

A MULTICULTURAL CHURCH?

**Multicultural Ministry as a Tool for Building the
Multicultural Church**

by

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**A thesis submitted to
The University of Birmingham
for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**Urban Theology Unit, Sheffield
Department of Theology and Religion
College of Arts and Law
The University of Birmingham**

September 2012

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ABSTRACT

This work explores the idea of a multicultural church and the possibility of its existence through the formation and development of multicultural ministry as a programmatic tool. The ideas and vision of a multicultural church and the development of multicultural ministry are presented through an auto-ethnographic lens using the participant-observer methodology. The study draws on the multicultural experiences of three mainline Christian Churches in different western contexts, with a particular focus on the United Reformed Church in the UK, to highlight the possibilities and the challenges of multicultural church and ministry. Looking at New Testament multicultural ecclesial models as proto-types for what Christ's Church in the twenty first century ought to look like, the study found the struggle to live with difference and diversity to be just as much of a blockage today, if not more pronounced. An underlying assumption throughout the work is that the multicultural ecclesial model is a core and central characteristic of Christ's church.

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ABBREVIATIONS

BME	Black and Minority Ethnic
BNP	British National Party
CRE	Commission for Racial Equality
CCRJ	Churches Commission for Racial Justice
CMEAC	Committee for Minority Ethnic Anglican Concerns
CTBI	Churches Together in Britain and Ireland
CWME	Commission on World Mission and Evangelism
CWM	Council for World Mission
EMLOMA	Ethnic Minority Lay and Ordained Ministers Assoc
ENFORMM	Ecumenical Network for Multicultural Ministry
FWCT	Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga
INFORM	International Network Forum on Multicultural Ministry
IRM	International Review of Mission
MLOLA	Multicultural Lay and Ordained Leaders Association
MMAG	Multicultural Ministry Advisory Group
MMAN	Multicultural Ministry Advocacy Network
PCUSA	Presbyterian Church USA
RJA	Racial Justice Advocacy Network
RJMM	Racial Justice and Multicultural Ministry
UAICC	Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress
UCA	Uniting Church in Australia
UCC	United Church of Canada
URC	United Reformed Church
WARC	World Alliance of Reformed Churches
WCC	World Council of Churches

Acknowledgements

I want to thank my friends at the Urban Theological Unit in Sheffield, in particular my supervisor Dr John Vincent; Dr Ian Duffy, and Kate Thompson for always welcoming me at short notice. I would like to acknowledge my friends in the United Reformed Church in the UK whose friendship and love I cherish and who have given me support each time I make the trip to the UK on study leave in particular Dr Susan Durber at Westminster College in Cambridge and Sandra and Francis Ackroyd in London. I would like to thank my friends and families in New Zealand especially Sia, Tusi and the Pole family. I acknowledge my UME friends in the Uniting Church in Australia for their support. I thank my sister Lilika for being there for me.

I remember with gratitude my parents Tupou and Tu'uta, and Hala Snr who have all gone from this life but whose faces are imprinted in my soul.

I dedicate this work to my husband Andrew and our daughter Lilliani who make everything worthwhile.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this work is critically to explore the idea of a multicultural church and the possibility of its existence through the creation and development of multicultural ministry as a multicultural tool. The work is a critical theological inquiry that embraces the notion of practical theology as “a theological reading of contemporary situation.”¹ It emerges out of “an embodied form of knowledge, both from the life of the researching author and the life of the research subject.”² Hence, my intention is to explore the ideas and challenges of a multicultural church and the development of multicultural ministry through the lens of my own narrative and working contexts, engaging the multicultural experiences of some key mainline Christian

¹An adequate practical theology, according to Mary Fulkerson, must address the “full-bodied” complexity of a contemporary situation, taking account of not just “biblical and creedal” concerns but also paying full attention to and articulating its “ambiguity, its implication in the banal and opaque realities of ordinary existence, even as it allows for testimony to God’s redemptive reality.” M. Fulkerson, Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp.7-9.

²Included in Don Schweitzer and Derek Simon’s notion of critical theology are “politically engaged theologies [that are] in dialogue with critical social theories” with common “practical liberationist intent” seeking to “build bridges towards a broader and more effective participation by faith communities in the social movements [that] advocate widespread social reconstructions.” D. Schweitzer & D. Simon (eds) Intersecting Voices: Critical Theologies in a Land of Diversity, (Ottawa: Novalis, 2004), p.9.

denominations around the world, with a specific focus on the United Reformed Church, in the UK.³

I have worked in the area of multicultural ministry for almost two decades, serving different Christian mainline denominations in different parts of the world – specifically the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA), the United Reformed Church in the UK (URC), and to a lesser extent, the United Church of Canada (UCC). In this capacity also, I have served the world church through local, national and global ecumenical bodies such as the World Council of Churches (WCC), the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), and the Council for World Mission (CWM) to name a few.

I am interested in the notion of a multicultural church as an ecclesial model for 21st century Christianity and its potential as a resource or model for social inclusion in a secular society.⁴ The latter point is articulated by Mary McClintock Fulkerson in terms of her zeal to “investigate a community that might have liberatory lessons for the

³ Further, practical theology should directly connect the “individual narrative [and] human experience [to] critical reflection” which should then impact the faith and action of the church in the world. S. Taylor, “Doing Practical Research Downunder: A Methodological Reflection on Recent Trends in Aberdonian Practical Theology”, *Contact* 142 (2003): 4. This is consistent with Fulkerson’s emphasis on “the way Christian faith occurs as a contemporary situation” above.

⁴ The study utilizes the notion of *social inclusion* within the framework of Peter Ratcliffe’s vision of the “inclusive society” and the model of multiculturalism presented by the Parekh Report. P. Ratcliffe, *Race, Ethnicity and Difference: Imagining the Inclusive Society*, (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2004), p.6. Runnymede Trust, *The Future of Multi-ethnic Britain: The Parekh Report*, (London: Profile Books, 2000).

secular society.”⁵ My primary critical focus, however, is Christian church and theology within which realm I seek a faith language that can rightly articulate what has been well-put by Schweitzer and Simon as “the social and political dimensions of the experience [of] the excluded and the marginalized.”⁶ A key concern here is the need to encourage and prioritise the building of “social capacities for justice and reconciliation” which are integral to the vision of a multicultural church and to the practice of multicultural ministry espoused by the study.⁷

In other words, I am primarily interested in seeking “liberatory lessons” within a contemporary Christian faith community for its own sake. I believe a Christian ecclesial formation is uniquely oriented to being multi-culturally inclusive, and to offering spaces of inclusion, as inherent to its nature and purpose as willed by God in Christ who called it into being. Practically, this requires an intentional and conscious effort by a whole church at all levels of its life and witness to be flexible and open to diverse ways of doing and being church. However, as the study will show, the practical steps required for churches to live and witness as truly just and inclusive multicultural

⁵Fulkerson is keen to give a theological reading of an “ordinary Christian community”, a gathering of people who are “usually divided by class, race and ability.” Fulkerson, Places of Redemption, p.3.

⁶For Schweitzer & Simon critical theology is just the tool for such a task given the fact that it originally developed as “critiques of Christian theology and the obliviousness of the churches to immense human suffering” and since then critical theology’s concerns have grown to include “critiques of racism, sexism, environmental destruction, colonialism, and homophobia.” Schweitzer & Simon, Intersecting Voices, p.10.

⁷ ibid

communities of Christ continue to be a struggle for many. Given that reality, a Christian ecclesial formation's capacity to offer such liberatory lessons beyond its bounds cannot be taken for granted.

Through my concrete experiences as a *minority ethnic* Christian woman of Polynesian background living in the west, and in my work in the church in the area of multicultural ministry, I believe I am afforded an ideal position to reflect critically on the issues of multicultural church and ministry, employing the auto-ethnographic methodology of participant-observation.⁸

I believe that my auto-ethnographic approach is consistent with the value current scholarship has conceded to contemporary ethnography, signaling a clear appreciation for ethnographic approaches to social research. Paul Walker advocates for the necessity of balancing "quantitative with qualitative perspectives", and a recognition of the overlaps between ethnography and disciplines such as the study of religion, particularly "the study of social contexts and institutions in the service of mission and ministry."⁹ Raymond Morrow affirms the "interpretive turn in the human sciences" that sees a:

⁸ Whilst recognizing the problems associated with both the terms *minority* and *ethnic* as highlighted in the Parekh Report (p.xxiii), *minority ethnic* is used in the study as a form of self-identification and in affirmation of Ratcliffe's contention that "at least it keeps the focus on exclusionary processes" and so the existence of an "ethnic majority" and "ethnic minorities" and the issue of numerical size are not ignored. Ratcliffe, *'Race' Ethnicity and Difference*, pp.10,35.

⁹ He promotes the application of well-developed ethnographic methodology in religious studies interested in examining the "social context in which the church's mission and ministry takes place." P. Walker,

...methodological shift which acknowledges that the analysis meaning cannot be reduced to objective causes ... [and] ... qualitative methods have an increasingly respectable standing, the centrality of value assumption to social inquiry and practice have been recognized, and social theory has flourished as a form of historical, self-reflexing theoretical discourse that is not limited to the methodological canons of a natural science.¹⁰

As participant-observer, notwithstanding its associated limitations which will be discussed in due course, my auto-ethnographic account adheres to key principles of the ethnographic research method that allow the researcher to be “immersed in the life of the community studied” and encourage active involvement in the research of the subjects being studied.¹¹

The significance of this study is that the issues of multicultural church and ministry continue to pose challenges for the theological and missional practice and thinking of the world wide ecumenical church. The study’s focus on the multicultural journey and experiences of the United Reformed Church in the UK (URC) as a case study is an attempt to gain insights into the ways in which a specific Christian mainline denomination responds to, and deals with, the challenges multiculturalism poses for its mission and ministry. That particular experience has implications for the mission and ministry of the world

“Perspectives from Ethnography: Applications in Mission and Urban Theology”, The British Journal of Theological Education 14.2 (2004):157-58

¹⁰ R. Morrow, “Marginalized Discourses, Standpoints, and Postmodern Theologies” in Schweitzer & Simon, Intersecting Voices, p.333.

¹¹ Walker reiterates the significance of these two ethnographic approaches to the researcher in establishing a “rapport with the people” being researched, and in terms of “group or community ownership” of the research. Walker in British Journal of Theological Education, 14.2, p.158.

wide church. How a Christian denomination can come to terms with its own increasingly diverse membership, and the theological, ecclesiological and mission implications there might be of that reality for its wider life and witness are questions of interest for the study.

A comparative analysis of the multicultural experiences of two mainline Christian denominations, namely the United Church of Canada (UCC) in the global north, and of the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) in the global south, offer important insights as well. Their multicultural journeys and experiences highlight further challenges for multicultural church and ministry and hence the continuing significance of these issues for the ongoing life and witness of the Christian church in the 21st century. The study will attempt to predict some of the possibilities for the future of a multicultural church, and the development of multicultural ministry. It is my hope that this study can make a contribution to:

- i) Twenty-first century Christian faith communities that are wrestling with questions about what it means to be church in contexts that are inescapably multicultural and diverse;
- ii) Theological institutions committed to equipping people for mission and ministry in multicultural contexts;

iii) Debates in the wider society on how to live with diversity and difference.¹²

The study is based on my original research and primary data as participant-observer. Its originality derives from:

- My own story as a minority ethnic migrant Christian woman living in a multicultural western context, seeking to find/construct a theology that speaks to my reality and is not complicit in silencing and thereby rendering invisible, living, breathing, and speaking-bodies like mine;¹³
- The United Reformed Church's unique ecclesiological experiment in the UK context in declaring itself a multicultural church, in its effort to develop multicultural ministry, and my central role in the development of multicultural church and ministry in that denomination;
- My first hand involvement in the development of the idea of multicultural church and the wider usage of multicultural ministry in the 90's and up to the present day, and;

¹² Ratcliffe highlights the distinction between the two where *difference* is ascribed more negative connotations when it is perceived as an "assertion of distinctiveness" and a function of "role ascription" thereby delineating and maintaining boundaries, whilst *diversity* is treated more positively for "a society may exhibit immense diversity in terms of people's self-identity ... yet be largely harmonious." Ratcliffe, *'Race', Ethnicity and Difference*, p.x.

¹³ Hwa Yung gives a comprehensive account of why much of western theology cannot adequately address non-western theological concerns mainly because it is uncritically cultural specific, it "presupposes a worldview overly influenced by the European Enlightenment" and it is deeply rooted in "the academic and speculative tradition" which robs it of the ability to be more "relevant to the realities of life." H. Yung, *Mangoes or Bananas? The Quest for an Authentic Asian Christian Theology*, (Oxford: Regnum, 1997), pp.1-9. The "realities of life" is expressed by Chung Hyun Kyung in terms of "... personal stories of agony and joy, struggle and liberation [that] are always connected with our socio-political and religio-cultural contexts." C. H. Kyung, *Struggle to be the Sun Again: Introducing Asian Women's Theology*, (London: SCM Press, 1991), p.1. The perspectives of both Yung and Kyong are echoed in my experiences of voicelessness and invisibility as a minority ethnic Christian woman from the developing world living and witnessing to my faith in a contemporary western context.

- The idea of a multicultural church as an ecclesial model for social inclusion, and multicultural ministry as an effective tool and resource for building a multicultural church, have not yet been the foci of a study at this level.

A Word on Method

The research methodology includes analysis of key multicultural declarations and policy statements of the three denominations named as well as other original documents. In particular, reports of the URC General Assembly and Standing Committees; evaluation of data gathered between 2001-2007 from interviews and questionnaires of a cross-section of members of the URC with myself as participant-observer, specifically the report from the audit process to tackle blockages preventing minority ethnic members from fully participating in the life of the Church; and a critical reflection on my role as an activist, initiator, facilitator, recorder, implementer and executive staff in the development of the ideas of multicultural church and ministry in the URC.

Further, there is comparative evaluation of the emerging multicultural ministry as a church response to cultural diversity and in relation to wider socio-political developments, particularly in the context of the literature and debates pertaining to theories and theologies of 'race'

and cultural diversity.¹⁴ An assessment of the appropriateness and success (or otherwise) of the practice of *multiculturalism* in the phenomena of multicultural ministry and church is made.¹⁵ Finally, a retrospective critique based on my current location looking back and attempting to interrogate the underlying theological, ideological and political implications of the events investigated, and the changes that took place.

As participant-observer, actively involved in the historical development being investigated, I am well aware of the limitations of my auto-ethnographic approach and the risks to scholarly impartiality. I am committed to being as transparent as possible about my own bias and prejudices, and will strive to be extra vigilant in guarding against risks of distortion due to any lack of self-awareness.

In respect of the seminal efforts of critical theological pioneers past and present, my commitment to transparency and self-critique is

¹⁴ As a theoretical framework 'race' is a contested concept as its scientific basis is disputed. Nevertheless, the term is used in the study as it still is the language being used in popular discourse but with inverted commas to denote its controversial usage and existence. Both civil and faith/religious organizations, for example, the International Council on Human Rights (ICHR) and the WCC, continue to wrestle with this tension. See International Council on Human Rights, Racial and Economic Exclusion: Policy Implications, (Switzerland: ICHRP, 2001), p.4; World Council of Churches, Transformative Justice: Being Church and Overcoming Racism, (Geneva: WCC, 2004), p.10; and additional literature on the meaning and usage of 'race' included in the Bibliography.

¹⁵ *Multiculturalism* as an ideology is understood in basic political terms consistent with Tariq Modood's notion as "an active state policy ... that recognizes the country or polity as a legitimate and irreducible plurality ... and not just a liberal association of autonomous individuals" with the attendant task of "reimagining or re-forming national identity (e.g. Britishness or Australianness) so that all can be part of it without having to deny or privatize" other identities that are significant to different members of the country. T. Modood, Multicultural Politics: Racism, Ethnicity and Muslims in Britain, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), p.18.

cemented by a desire to contribute to the ongoing task of increasing and maintaining what Schweitzer and Simon refer to as the “capacity of religious discourse for social engagement.”¹⁶ In the very least, I would want my work to contribute to critical theology’s tradition of habitual self-critique, transparency, and accountability in the service of the marginalized and excluded.¹⁷

Certainly, there are ongoing concerns about whether as participant-observer I am an *insider* or an *outsider* in relation to the groups/institutions being studied. In particular, the concern about my ability to distance myself sufficiently from the subject matter and situation being researched in order to reflect critically and without bias on issues that I was and continue to be very close to. I can only reiterate my commitment to transparency throughout the work as I have grown to appreciate Walker’s assertion that “we are all and always both insiders and outsiders in varying degrees in different contexts.”¹⁸

¹⁶ Schweitzer & Simon, Intersecting Voices, p.332.

¹⁷ As Schweitzer and Simon insist critical theologies “can remain socially engaged only on the condition of remaining self-critical, by seeking to be transparent and accountable” and by prioritizing “solidarity with people who are marginalized and dispossessed.” *ibid.*

¹⁸ Walker accepts that there is always an ongoing “insider/outsider dialectic” and notably he raises the important concern that Christian “bias towards action, change, and transformation for justice” can impact perspective and therefore the research. That is, the “inherent Christian commitment to change” raises issues about Christian mission contexts as research projects “in their own terms.” Walker in The British Journal of Theological Education, 14.2, p.160.

A Word on 'Multicultural Church'

Multicultural church is generally used in the study to refer to what Robert Schreiter defines as "many cultures in the one Church."¹⁹ While the scope for cultural diversity can accommodate other forms of difference and sub-cultures, the study's primary focus is *racial-ethnic* diversity.²⁰

Significantly, a distinction is being made between the *multicultural composition/membership* and the *multicultural practices* of a church. One can hardly deny that contemporary mainline Christian churches are multicultural in composition. But whether that diverse membership is reflected in church practices, activities, processes, and procedures is the core concern of this study, and shapes my definition of what a truly multicultural church is. Of specific interest to the research are the following questions:

- (i) What does it mean in practice to be a multicultural church?
- (ii) What might such a church look like?
- (iii) Is it appropriate as an approach to being church in the 21st century?

¹⁹ R. Schreiter, *Ministry for a Multicultural Church*, <<http://www.sedos.org/english/schreiter.htm>> 21 May 2008.

²⁰ The study employs the term *racial-ethnic* to denote a specific cultural difference distinct from other forms of socio-political difference like gender, sexuality, ability and class, for example. For convenience the study uses the term to reflect the reality in my experience of the two terms being utilized interchangeably and as Ratcliffe points out "[ethnic] already acts as a euphemism for 'race'" especially when 'race' is expected to offend. Ratcliffe, *'Race', Ethnicity and Difference*, p.25. The ongoing debate about 'race' will continue to be indicated throughout the study in the use of single quotation marks whenever the term 'race' is used.

- (iv) Can it address issues of ecclesiology, theology and mission adequately?
- (v) How far can it challenge exclusionary practices within a church?
- (vi) Can a multicultural church be a model of social inclusion that challenges exclusionary practices in the society as a whole?
- (vii) Do any conclusions follow regarding the wider concept of multiculturalism?

A Word on 'Multicultural Ministry'

The Ecumenical Network for Multicultural Ministries (ENFORMM) which is an international affiliated body of the Commission for World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) of the World Council of Churches (WCC) defines multicultural ministry in its mission statement as "ministry with all peoples across the boundaries of various cultures."²¹ The term *multicultural ministry* was first formally used in the 1996 Conference on World Mission and Evangelism of the World Council of Churches (WCC).²² Since then it has become commonly used by many churches around the world, in Canada, USA, UK and Europe, to refer to such work in the life of the church.²³ So the use of the term *multicultural*

²¹ ENFORMM, Mission Statement, WCC International Review of Mission, 100.1(392) (April 2011):107.

²² C. Crowe, & S. Y. Crowe (eds.), First International Network Forum on Multicultural Ministry, (Sydney: INFORM, 1999).

²³ The Presbyterian Church in the USA (PCUSA) and Uniting Church in Australia (USA) are two examples.

ministry in the study is primarily in reference to church programmes for, and work with, people from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Multicultural ministry is also known in different contexts as *cross-cultural* and/or *intercultural* ministry.²⁴ Churches in countries like Canada and Australia, where multiculturalism has been an official government policy, have begun to explore what is perceived as deeper approaches to the multicultural vision. While the jury is still out on the success or failure of multiculturalism, these churches have felt that more proactive and dynamic efforts at engaging across cultural boundaries beyond the mere tolerance and appreciation associated with multiculturalism were urgently needed.

Hence, the use of the term *cross-cultural* in the Uniting Church in Australia implies a proactive movement across cultural barriers to form more authentic and closer relationships. The use of the term *inter-cultural* in the United Church of Canada conjures up images of mutuality and reciprocity in relationships.

The study will argue that true and real multiculturalism exists where there is vibrant and dynamic cross-cultural and inter-cultural relationships and practices. Put another way, the cross-cultural and

²⁴ For example, the United Church of Canada (UCC) uses the term *inter-cultural* and in the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) *cross-cultural* is also used.

the inter-cultural are integral and vital aspects of the multicultural. Without live, active and habitual cross-cultural and inter-cultural engagements and exchanges, multiculturalism in its truest sense does not exist, which thereby give credence to the claim by some in western contexts that multiculturalism has failed. The study is therefore interested to consider the following questions:

- (i) What does multicultural ministry mean in practice?
- (ii) How useful/effective is it as a tool for growing a multicultural church?
- (iii) How far can it address issues of racial justice and equality in the church?
- (iv) Is its scope as a programme/ministry in the church culturally inclusive enough?
- (v) What role does it play at the interface between church intention, policy and practice?

A Word on the 'United Reformed Church'

The research involves a case study that focuses on one church in the UK that has declared itself a multicultural church. As one of the so-called mainline Christian denominations in Britain, the United Reformed Church (URC) stands alone in having declared itself to be a

multicultural church at its General Assembly in 2005.²⁵ At that point in its life and witness, the URC confidently asserted its culturally diverse membership. Practically, though, it was aware that such a declaration was more of a vision and an aspiration than a normative practice. It was a symbolic statement that signaled a commitment to ensuring that in its practices and ways of being church, multicultural inclusiveness and just sharing of power and resources across cultural divides were clearly evident.

In its specific experiences and journey, the URC's understanding of multicultural church assumes the centrality of just and inclusive relations. Its multicultural declaration marked the culmination of a history of policy statements affirming the denomination's commitment to what it believed to be biblical values of justice, equality and inclusiveness.²⁶ It also marked a new phase in its journey towards becoming a multicultural church, as a way of being church for the new millennium.

The creation in 2000 of the post of Assembly Secretary for Racial Justice reflected a significant shift in the theological and missional thinking of the URC. Prior to that, the Assembly had seen several

²⁵ The United Reformed Church in the UK is a three nation church, in England, Wales and Scotland and is a union of the English Presbyterian Church, the Welsh and Scottish Congregationalists and members of the Churches of Christ inaugurated in 1972, the union expanded in 1981 and 2000 with newer additions. URC, Basis of Union: Part A, (London: URC, 2000). URC, "Resolution 52: Catch the Vision Report", Assembly Record, (London: URC, 2005), p.41.

²⁶See chapter three for a chronological list of these policy statements.

debates and submissions on the issue of *racial-ethnic* diversity in relation to the denomination's mission agenda and priorities. The study will show that these debates and conversations formed part of the denomination's continuing and growing consciousness of socio-political developments in the wider British society, and indicated responses to those developments.²⁷ The study considers particularly the emergence of multicultural ministry in the URC in the period 2001 – 2007, attempting to uncover some of the issues at the interface between church intention, policy and practice, and the theological questions involved.

A Word on the Researcher: Who am I?

My interest and involvement in multicultural work in the church began in the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) as a young adult.²⁸ In 1985 that Church declared itself a multicultural church and since that declaration, many activities and programmes for young people actively promoted cultural diversity and the importance of being a culturally inclusive church. I was very active in these programmes as a young person and as a young leader.

²⁷ For example the growing profile, esp. in the media, of extreme right political groups like the British National Party (BNP) and the growing population of refugee and asylum seekers. Plenty of researchers and social scientists have provided evidence for such developments over the years. Dench, Gavron and Young in a very comprehensive study of the East End of London that took over four decades outline the “growing numbers of candidates from extreme right-wing parties standing in local and general elections...plus the growing antagonism nationally to asylum seekers and refugees...” G Dench et al, *The New East End: Kinship, Race and Conflict*, (London: Profile Books, 2006), pp.7, 216.

²⁸ The Uniting Church in Australia is a union of three denominations, namely Methodist, Presbyterian, and Congregational, which was inaugurated in 1977.

In 1995, as the multicultural worker for the UCA Synod of New South Wales (state level) I worked very closely with my colleague at the national level, a Korean-Australian lay woman named Seongja-Yoo Crowe, in developing what we called *multicultural ministry* in the UCA. At the same time I became actively involved in the work of the World Council of Churches Youth Unit to combat racism which led to my participation on the WCC Planning Group for its Conference on World Mission and Evangelism held in Bahia, Brazil in 1996. At that conference I was part of the UCA delegation that brought the report and recommendation to WCC on multicultural ministry – a defining moment in the wider use of the term in the world ecumenical arena.

In July 2001 I was inducted by the General Assembly of the United Reformed Church in the UK as its first Secretary for Racial Justice.

I have been a multicultural ministry visionary and practitioner, planning, strategizing, developing, running and implementing multicultural programmes and policies in western mainline churches for almost twenty years. In all that time I have witnessed these churches growing ever more multicultural and diverse. Yet, the question of how to live with racial-ethnic diversity and difference continues to be a huge struggle for them. In the language of the Parekh Report, it is entirely possible for a just and robustly inclusive

multicultural church “at ease with its rich diversity” to exist.²⁹ But it requires intentional and purposeful action and processes to make that happen. Multicultural ministry is the tool that can transform the vision into reality. This study offers good practice ideas for building vibrant multicultural churches of Christ now and into the future.

²⁹ Runnymede Trust, Parekh Report, p.x.

Chapter One

IMAGINING THE INCLUSIVE COMMUNITY

I borrow from Peter Ratcliffe's book sub-title "*Imagining the Inclusive Society*" though my emphasis on *inclusive community* reflects a personal journey and commitment to finding a place of uncontested belonging – i.e. a racially and culturally inclusive community.³⁰ This journey is therefore framed as an auto-ethnographic approach to understanding social inequality and division.

Ratcliffe's assertion that these issues constitute "arguably the most pressing questions of global society" is presupposed and implied throughout the chapter and indeed the whole study.³¹ My auto-ethnographic framing allows for a mapping of the landscape of socio-political inequality and division with key *landmarks of difference* signposted along the way in terms outlined by Ratcliffe as "race", ethnicity, culture, religion and nation; invariably mediated by issues of

³⁰ P. Ratcliffe, *'Race', Ethnicity and Difference: Imagining the Inclusive Society*, (New York: Open University Press, 2004).

³¹ Ratcliffe, *'Race, Ethnicity and Difference*, p.viii.

class, status, power and gender.”³² In addition, I signal my interest in ecclesial forms of community as unique and ideal social formations of inclusion in a postmodern pluralistic world characterized by Ratcliffe as a “multiplicity of individual and collective aims, aspirations and expectations.”³³ Richard Dyer calls this “postmodern multiculturalism” and he cautions against these multiple and diverse voices becoming nothing more than a sideshow for the amusement of members of the white dominant culture.³⁴

An Auto-ethnographic Account

Encouraged by the words of Chung Hyun Kyung’s supervisor that she “write [her] dissertation about something which hurts [her] the most” I embarked on this study project with my own supervisor’s urging to write about the *bee in my bonnet*.³⁵ That *bee in my bonnet* began to take shape when my parents *uprooted* our family from the island kingdom of Tonga in the South Pacific to go *west* in search of opportunities for further education for myself and my siblings.³⁶

³² *ibid.*

³³ Ratcliffe, *‘Race’, Ethnicity and Difference*, p.ix.

³⁴ Dyer warns against the risk of such multiculturalism turning into a “side-show for white people who look on with delight at all the differences that surround them.” R. Dyer, *White*, (London: Routledge, 1997), p.5.

³⁵ Kyung’s supervisor was James Cone who also told her: “If you really want to voice the struggle of the poor, never present it poorly.” C. Kyung, *Struggle to be the Sun Again: Introducing Asian Women’s Theology*, (London: SCM Press, 1990), p. xii. Needless to say I could not have done this work without the urging, encouragement, and support of my supervisor Dr John Vincent.

³⁶ The terms “west” and “western” are used in the study as convenient short-hand generalizations but fully recognizing the complexities attendant on such terms. In accordance with Hall & Gieben’s treatment of the concept, the underlying assumption here is that *west* is more a historical than a geographical construct, and *western* is generally used in reference to “a society that is developed, industrialized, urbanized, capitalist,

I use the word *uprooted* as I imagined a plant being uprooted from familiar soil and surroundings and replanted in an alien and foreign soil and environment. Kyung articulates a similar sense of being uprooted in terms of the plant losing the ability to sink “her roots deeply into the rich soil” of her people and to “drink water from the well of [her] people’s history and culture.”³⁷

This is quite a profound image of displacement and loss. But my father believed that continuing our education in a western context was the best way to avail ourselves of opportunities for flourishing in what he saw as a perpetually invasive western world that he felt ill-equipped to protect or insulate us from.³⁸ He was very aware of the global dominance and homogenizing influence of what Dyer calls the “white West”, which my father perceived as controlling the world media,

secular and modern.” The more pertinent issue of how the “west and the rest was constructed” will be revisited later in the chapter. See S. Hall, & B. Gieben, (ed.), Formations of Modernity, (Oxford: Polity Press and Open University, 1992), p.276.

I use lower case *w* deliberately throughout the study in resistance to reifying a dominant construction of the *west* that I do not subscribe to. I use upper case only when quoting the work of another.

³⁷ Kyung, Struggle to be the Sun, p. xiii. Would it survive? Can it take root in the new environment? These were basic questions of my migrant experience that continue to be a challenge for many migrants today.

³⁸ My father was a simple farmer who was deeply interested in world affairs and was serious about being well-informed. He studied theology at Sia’atoutai Theological College in Tonga but did not pursue a call to the ordained ministry. He read widely, as far as that was possible in Tonga, especially in the areas of theology, philosophy and politics; he listened religiously to BBC radio news broadcasts in his tiny transistor radio as his way of keeping up with what was happening around the world. He was a keen musician and as a renowned composer/conductor in Tonga, he taught Handel’s *Messiah* in English, as well as other classical choral pieces, to uneducated village choirs with no English whatsoever. He composed Tongan popular music that continues to be great favourites with Tongan audiences today. He had a huge and lasting influence in my own thinking and worldview especially in theology and in my recent book with Stephen Bevans it was appropriate to honour him on the dedication page as my very first teacher of contextual theology. S. Bevans, & K. Tahaafe-Williams, (eds), Contextual Theology for the Twenty-first Century,(Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2011).

politics, and education.³⁹ Even in a small island like Tonga, the prevalence of western news broadcasts, pop culture, and Hollywood movies was evident.

My family migrated to New Zealand first, then to Australia where we settled. It did not take me long to realise the cost to our family of such a move, and the huge sacrifices my parents made. Our family unit and unity was never the same again. Moreover, the discovery that my visible difference from the western white norm marked me as *excluded* as well as *inferior other* almost dislodged me from the firm foundation of my Tongan identity and upbringing. It caused me to question my own self-worth on several occasions, as a child and as an adult, as I negotiated a kind of schizophrenic existence between a self-confident proud Tongan and an inferiorised invisible *other*.

My need to find a place of uncontested belonging took on the form of a very agitated and noisy *bee in my bonnet*. From the outset, even just imagining such an inclusive community was clearly a challenge. Prior to leaving my simple village life in Tonga I had little direct contact with westerners, though I was very aware of the western world as a kind of ubiquitous presence. Western influences were evident everywhere in the Tongan society, in education, religion, and the economy. As a

³⁹ Dyer welcomes what he calls “postmodern multiculturalism” as it allows for a “myriad of postmodern voices” to be heard and for the “voices of the other” to challenge the “authority of the white West.” The study uses *western* and *white* interchangeably reflecting the point made above.

member of the British Commonwealth, Tonga's political system was fashioned after the Westminster model. These western influences were more prominent in the capital Nuku'alofa than in village life, but even the village was not too remote or immune to such forces. This further convinced my parents of the need to equip their children to survive in such a world, so there was an expectation in our home that we should be able to communicate in both our Tongan mother tongue and in English.

Characteristically inquisitive as a child, I discovered a whole world to feed my curiosity in books which was a blessing in terms of improving my English. By six years old I had read all the Tongan books and reading materials in our home including the Tongan translation of the Christian Bible. Whilst English was taught at school from Kindergarten onwards, English reading materials were not easy to come by in a Tongan village setting. I was hungry to get my hands on anything to read so I turned to my older siblings' study texts and novels, cartoons, magazines, and romantic literature beyond my years with words I could not pronounce, let alone comprehend. It was then I had the *light bulb moment* that unfamiliar words can become familiar and comprehensible (even with pronunciation as an ongoing challenge) if I just kept reading and paid close attention to the context within which they appeared. This realization was useful where an English dictionary was a rare possession.

With persistence and resourcefulness I gained access to a variety of books from a variety of sources. By the time I left Tonga at nine and a half, I had read through kiddie pulp fiction like *Nancy Drew*, *The Hardy Boys* and the *Famous Five* by Enid Blyton as well as the more substantial English/European 19th and 20th century literary works such as Dicken's *Great Expectations*, the Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* and *Jane Eyre*, Dumas' *Count of Monte Cristo* and *The Three Musketeers*, Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, Pasternak's *Dr Zhivago*.⁴⁰ Whilst I was too young and naïve to appreciate the literary significance of some of these works, it was not lost on me that I had been blessed with a means of being transported to intriguing and exotic realities beyond my own imagination; worlds so distant and far removed from my Pacific Island context that I could never imagine living in them. At the time they were no more than exciting and fantastic stories to me – some much more challenging and laborious than others to get through.

My life in Tonga was never easy, but it was rich with meaning, respect, hospitality, undisputed belonging and rooted in deep faith and spirituality.⁴¹ These meanings and values infused our home, our

⁴⁰ I discovered much later that both the Nancy Drew and Hardy Boys series were created by Edward Stratemeyer who hired various authors to write the stories which he then published under the pseudonyms Carolyn Keene and Franklin W. Dixon respectively.

⁴¹ In discussing the Jamaican childhood setting of the main character in Joan Riley's novel *The Unbelonging* (1985), Glenn Jordan and Chris Weedon characterized it as "a world rich in metaphor and

kinship relationships, the wider community and all aspects of life. From birth I was brought up to be proud of my Tongan roots and ancestry as central to who I am and where I came from. My parents were very clear that proper grounding in Tongan cultural values and traditions, coupled with as thorough an education as possible (albeit a western oriented one) were critical for equipping me to survive in this globalised western world.⁴²

Integral to my childhood learning was the understanding that fundamental to Tongan hospitality is an embedded predisposition to welcome the *other* in our midst. Tongan hospitality prioritises the human dignity of the *other*, the *stranger*. That means that the *difference* of the *non-Tongan other* is not to be demeaned, ridiculed, or judged in any way that would dehumanize him or her.

In my experience westerners were unreservedly welcomed in Tonga with hospitality and respect. There was no pressure on them to be skilled in our Tongan cultural norms. They dressed their way, they ate the food that they were familiar with, they spoke their own language,

natural imagery.” Those words immediately made sense to me for they described precisely my childhood world too. See G. Jordan, & C. Weedon, Cultural Politics: Class, Gender, Race and the Postmodern World, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1997), p.234.

⁴² My parents’ emphasis on Tongan culture and western education in my upbringing later proved to be indispensable tools for helping me cope with identity issues and tensions between who I am perceived to be and who I see myself as. It was the foundation for equipping me to be what I call *bi-culturally literate and competent* which is akin to what Jung Yung Lee termed “in-beyond” – a new identity formed out of the new reality that “transcends marginalization” incorporating the “in-between [and] in-both” dimensions of marginal identity – in his influential and still vitally relevant work on marginality. See J. Lee, Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), pp.47-53.

preferred socializing with their own kind, and their Tongan hosts would do everything to provide whatever was needed for the comfort and care of their guests.⁴³ Yet I perceived a general lack of concern for welcoming and giving hospitality to the *other* in my new surroundings. Indeed, a prominent and ongoing feature of my migrant experience is lack of welcome codified and institutionalized in western immigration policies and practices that have been and continue to be inhospitable to the *nonwhite* other.⁴⁴

Moreover, I never imagined it possible to live next door to other human beings and not be neighbourly with them, but I discovered this was quite common in a western context. For years my family lived next door to white neighbours that we never knew or socialized with. Some were overtly hostile and others indifferent. The rest seemed just too busy with the demands of urban life and had no time to relate.⁴⁵

⁴³ Hosts here being inclusive of state agencies like customs, the tourist board, the general public and not restricted to the friends, families and individuals directly doing the hosting.

⁴⁴ Ratcliffe considers the “migrant experience [a] site of exclusion” where from the outset ‘race’ and ethnicity are key factors in western immigration policies that determine “who is to be admitted”. This in turn has implications for the “minorities currently resident in the country” and for the “project of defining the nation”. Put another way, the “racialization of immigration control” in countries like Australia and Britain, for example, reflect an exclusionary process of nation-building which deems the “nonwhite other” lacking the “defining criteria” of an “Australian [or British] citizen” and give mixed messages to “those already settled” in the country that are “at odds with the inclusionary vision projected by anti-discrimination legislation” and multicultural cohesion rhetoric. Ratcliffe, *‘Race’ Ethnicity and Difference*, p.43-53. Recognizing the problems with the term *nonwhite* which are several, the most negative of which is the implication that the “nonwhite subject exists only as a function of the white subject,” nevertheless, like Dyer the study uses the term reluctantly as many dark skinned people don’t feel included in the term *black*, and *coloured* only perpetuates the notion that *others* have colour while whites do not. Dyer, *White*, p.11.

⁴⁵ Coming from a communal culture and village life where the whole village is your neighbour which means human interconnectedness and interdependence are integral to daily co-existence, living next door to virtual strangers for long periods was quite a culture shock that took me years to get used to.

For many years I watched my parents, former gracious hosts to white visitors and pillars of the Tongan community, desperately trying to rise above demeaning and humiliating white racism with dignity and integrity. On the issue of housing, for example, after several failed attempts my father in desperation turned to a white acquaintance willing to vouch for our *reliability* and *clean habits* so that a property could be rented to us. That humiliating experience impressed upon me the widespread stereotype of Pacific Islanders (PI) as “unreliable and dirty.”⁴⁶ Vince Marotta gives an account of how PIs, as a target group for racism in New Zealand, became a convenient scapegoat for some of the country’s economic problems.⁴⁷

In the work place, my father especially suffered the worst indignities in the hands of white bosses who viewed Pacific Islanders as ignorant and lazy. Having to put up with the constant racist name-calling and condescension was wearying enough, but the powerlessness to change his work conditions was the most debilitating for him. From experience he knew that to protest was to risk losing his job which was not an option because he had mouths to feed.

⁴⁶ Pacific Islander, more popularly known in the acronym PI, is the now commonly used term in New Zealand and Australia to refer to people like myself who originate from the South Pacific Islands. Though it is a contested social construct associated with certain negative connotations (e.g. backward, primitive, unreliable, dirty), younger generations of PIs are asserting this social label as self-identity and pride analogous to the way young African-American rappers use the term *nigger* in their music and pop culture discourse.

⁴⁷ V. Marotta, “The Ambivalence of Borders: The Bicultural and The Multicultural” in J. Docker & G. Fischer (eds.) Race, Colour & Identity in Australia and New Zealand (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2000), p.180.

Through all these humiliations my father did not become bitter. In fact, he was what I would call a pragmatist and in Modood's terms an "assimilationist" in that he continued to push his children to make the best of whatever opportunities the western world had to offer.⁴⁸ He even saw inter-racial relationships as one of those opportunities, notwithstanding that miscegenation was still frowned upon in some circles.⁴⁹ For my father it was not so much about two persons coming together as it was about the marriage of the best of two worldviews and cultures for mutual enrichment. Still for him too the limit to assimilation was to draw the line where our Tongan identity was questioned or disrespected.

From the outset I felt alienated in my new environment. I was overwhelmed by the physical presence of white people and bodies everywhere I turned. That dominating white presence signified to me my new reality of exclusion and disputed belonging; of abnormal inferior *other*, an outsider, a foreigner which was quite traumatizing. As a brown-skinned adolescent, I knew that I was marked as different in this new context. I knew that I was somehow immediately categorized as less worthy because of it, but I lacked the capacity to

⁴⁸ I resonate with Modood's description of his father as an "unashamed assimilationist" who wanted his children to assimilate into the best of British elites and "world-class institutions" but with a clear notion that the "limit of assimilation was shame of one's origins." Modood, Multicultural Politics, p.4.

⁴⁹ Dyer discusses the prevailing disfavour with which miscegenation is held in white circles as largely due to the white fear that "inter-racial sexuality threatens the power of whiteness [and] white racial purity." Dyer, White, p.25. Ratcliffe also discusses miscegenation in similar terms and mentions the associated myth of the "hyper-sexuality" of the black male as an additional compounding threat to white racial purity. Ratcliffe, 'Race', Ethnicity and Difference, p.19.

articulate what I intuitively knew to be true. As I got older I realised that I was experiencing racial inferiorisation associated with dark skin which contrasted the valorization of white skin that seemed to permeate the whole society.⁵⁰ My experiences revealed to me in a multitude of ways, both explicit and implicit, an unquestioned privileged position of white people in the society and indeed in the world.⁵¹ Jacqueline Battalora demonstrates the pervasiveness of white privilege through her own experiences including the fact that she can apply for a bank loan with confidence that her white skin colour guarantees her an assumption of good credit risk.⁵²

On my first day at school in New Zealand, I was put in a class made up entirely of PIs and Maoris.⁵³ I was puzzled as to why there was not a single white face in the room, given that the school was predominantly white. After taking some tests on my own, I was moved to a different class. When I walked into my new class full of white kids, I wondered why some of my former class mates could not join me in my new class. It was a shock when I realised that my former class

⁵⁰ The chapter will further expand on the valorization of whiteness but for now it is helpful to mention the use of everyday language and imagery that projects the colour white as positive and black as negative so that, for example, white is often associated with *pure* and *purity* (e.g. pure white as snow) while dark and black are often associated with *sin* and *badness* (e.g. *black sheep* or *black heart* or to headline the news about a tragedy as a *black day*).

⁵¹ The work of Peggy McIntosh (2001[1988]) on white privilege continues to be highly influential.

⁵² She details the pervasiveness of white privilege in the society in both explicit and implicit ways including “It is an option for me to learn the traditions and norms of other racial groups, but it is not culturally necessary that I do so” etc... J. Battalora, “Whiteness: The Workings of an Ideology in American Society and Culture”, in Rosemary R. Ruether (ed.), Gender, Ethnicity & Religion, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), p.8.

⁵³ The indigenous people of New Zealand are known as Maori.

was designated the *underachievers'* class.⁵⁴ Already I was struggling to understand why the class for *dummies* was filled only with brown kids like me.⁵⁵

This was a personal close encounter with the widely held *PI=dumb* stereotype. Very quickly I learned that in that context to be Maori or PI was synonymous with being illiterate, lazy, violent and inferior to the *Pakeha*.⁵⁶ Later in Australia I was confronted with the predominant image of indigenous Australians described by Sally Morgan as "the lowest of the low [the] one race on earth that had nothing to offer."⁵⁷

So a standout feature of my early migrant experience was coping with the pervasiveness of the inferiorisation and exclusion of dark-skinned peoples like me. It was becoming clear to me that I inhabit a world in which my belonging was questionable and constantly contested. Moreover, to survive in it I must quickly learn how to cope with the

⁵⁴ A more polite way of calling it.

⁵⁵ This was how the kids in my new class referred to my old class.

⁵⁶ *Pakeha* is the Maori word for white person/people. It is still contested in some white circles largely due to the ambiguity of "the constitution of the group *Pakeha*", as many New Zealand whites not originally from Britain do not feel included in the term. See N. Nola, "Exploring Disallowed Territory: Introducing the Multicultural Subject into New Zealand Literature", in Docker & Fischer, *Race, Colour & Identity*, p.207.

⁵⁷ S. Morgan, *My Place*, (Fremantle: Arts Centre Press, 1987), p.305.

I was so disturbed by the racist portrayal of the indigenous Australians that was rife in the news media and popular culture that I joined a Uniting Church Youth *Faith and Culture Exchange Programme* in 1991-92 so I could learn more about Aboriginal culture. This involved traveling to Far North Queensland to spend time learning from Aboriginal peoples and communities and included two weeks living, eating, working and having fellowship together with specific Aboriginal communities. I had the privilege of living with the Jumbun Community which was struggling to maintain self-sufficiency after a white farmer used by the government as an *administrator* for the community had bankrupted them by years of siphoning their grant money into his own interests. It was humbling and inspiring to see the community pick itself up and began from scratch without bitterness. One of the conditions of the youth programme was that each participant was to return to their homes and spent 6-12 months raising awareness in their own communities about Aboriginal culture and way of life. I spent the next twelve months going around church communities in Sydney sharing about my experience, promoting better understanding of and justice for indigenous Australians.

reality of racial exclusion which no legally conferred citizenship status and rights can really alleviate. Vinoth Ramachandra makes the point that citizenship does not guarantee inclusion and belonging for the *outsider* or the *nonwhite other*.⁵⁸ I was learning that racial prejudice and exclusion do not diminish with the achievement of citizenship status.

The fact that I was immediately put in the PI class in the New Zealand school suggested that all PI kids were negatively marked from the outset as unintelligent. When I performed *surprisingly* well in the tests I was moved to a *better* class filled with white kids, suggesting that all white kids were seen as more able. Without the skills, maturity, or support for analysis and for unpacking such concerns, I was burdened by the implication that all brown kids like me were seen generally as stupid while all white kids were presumed to be smart. Unbidden and without conscious intention, I assumed a life-long commitment to, and responsibility for, disputing and dispelling such notions. At that point I instinctively understood this responsibility in terms of passing tests and exams, convinced that as long as I was doing well in that situation, at least I could counter the notion that white kids had a monopoly on ability.

⁵⁸ He distinguishes between “legal citizenship” which is about legal rights and status, and “belonging” which is about “being accepted and feeling welcomed.” Citizenship does not guarantee racial inclusion so one can be a citizen and still an “outsider” which really diminishes the “quality of social and political” engagement and can explain the tendency of minority ethnic people to “ghettoize themselves for fear of rejection and ridicule or out of a deep sense of alienation.” V. Ramachandra, Subverting Global Myths: Theology and the Public Issues Shaping Our World, (Downers Grover, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), p.149.

I reflected much later that this thinking not only demonstrated my growing awareness of racism but also formed my earliest stance of anti-racist activism. I was old enough to understand, if only intuitively, that the fact of my being different from the white norm meant a constant struggle to dismantle preconceived notions of what and who I am. Clearly, finding the racially just and inclusive community was going to be more difficult than I imagined.

Years later I led a diversity and racism awareness seminar for a church group in London in which one of the white participants insisted that children do not see racial-ethnic difference since her boys went to a mixed school and there they treat all kids the same.⁵⁹ Apart from the disturbing implication that this was one more person added to the many who mistakenly equate *same treatment* with *fair/equal treatment*, I recalled my own childhood experiences where I saw and I knew that I was treated as different. Further, my life experiences since has left me in no doubt, that in a multitude of ways I am reminded of the fact that I am different — as being outside of the white norm — and that such difference is associated with certain material disadvantages and meanings.

⁵⁹ Frances Kendall highlights well documented studies of children and ‘race’ that demonstrate how kids’ racial conditioning is exactly like gender role socialization in that children “learn race roles as they learn sex roles, from all that they observe around them” which they then internalize and re-create. F. Kendall, Understanding White Privilege: Creating Pathways to Authentic Relationships Across Race, (New York: Routledge, 2006), pp.49-50.

Frances Kendall is clear that systematically white and black people are not treated the same, though for her that does not mean that different people should be treated as if they were the same.⁶⁰ As Ramachandra explains, “equal respect for people does not always mean treating them identically” if the concern is to create a level playing field and to balance power dynamics.⁶¹ On the contrary, he would argue that “equal respect translates into non-equal treatment” because groups who have long suffered abuse and demoralization need intentional processes of equalization that involves giving them special treatment and rights.⁶² Anticipating the risk of reverse discrimination, Ramachandra notes that this approach applies equally to a long-suffering poor white community as to a long-suffering racially subjugated nonwhite group.⁶³ I would want to be clear that claims of reverse discrimination should not become obfuscating processes that mask the real issue of perpetual hegemonic white power and dominance – what Charles Mills calls “white supremacy”.⁶⁴ There is also the risk of fostering and perpetuating a *victim* mindset and relationships of dependency. As Fulkerson rightly points out, there are

⁶⁰ She reflects on the prevalence of racial disparities and inequalities that demonstrate this reality but insists that it is never a good idea to treat different people as if they are the same. Kendall, Understanding White Privilege, pp.28-29.

⁶¹ Ramachandra, Subverting Global Myths, p.149.

⁶² Ramachandra, Subverting Global Myths, p. 150.

⁶³ Ramachandra, Subverting Global Myths, p.150.

⁶⁴ C. Mills, “White Supremacy as Sociopolitical System: A Philosophical Perspective”, in A. Doane, & E. Bonilla-Silva, (eds) White Out: The Continuing Significance of Racism, (New York: Routledge, 2003), p.40.

indeed ambiguities involved and multiple levels of complicity and agency, but they still do not create an equal and level playing field.⁶⁵

Over the years as my engagement with the issue of 'race' deepened, I realised that the apparent *not seeing* difference expressed by the white participant in my workshop was and is characteristic of *colour-blindness* associated with *white privilege*. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva discusses the central features of colour-blind racism including the kind of "abstract liberalism" that does not see 'race' as an issue and uses tools initially created to combat racial inequality as justification and rationale for it.⁶⁶

White privilege is explained by Kendall as systematic white access to power and resources in a system of white supremacy and superiority created by white men on behalf of white people.⁶⁷ Margaret Andersen sees white privilege as an "unacknowledged and unquestioned system of racial privilege...that structures a system of advantage and

⁶⁵ Fulkerson, Places of Redemption, p.61.

⁶⁶ Hence the use of "I am all for equal opportunity, that's why I oppose affirmative action" as a standard response that totally ignores the continuing impact "of past and contemporary" racial discrimination and the "savage racial inequalities between whites and nonwhite minorities". E. Bonilla-Silva, "New Racism, Color-Blind Racism, and the Future of Whiteness in America", in White Out pp.271-284. For Bonilla-Silva's more detailed discussion of colour-blindness see E. Bonilla-Silva, Racism without Racists: Color Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States, (Boulder, CO: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).

⁶⁷ She sees it as being systematically and systemically maintained and bestowed on "those of us who, by race, resemble the people who hold the power positions in our institutions." Kendall, Understanding White Privilege, p.62. Again see Peggy McIntosh's "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack", Peace and Freedom, (Philadelphia: Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, 1989).

disadvantage" favouring white people.⁶⁸ Kendall insists that all white people have white privilege "although the extent to which they have it varies depending on gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, age, physical ability, size and weight."⁶⁹ It is privilege that is hardest to see by the privileged themselves, and as Kendall explains, white privilege is especially hard to see by (and to discuss with) "white people who don't feel powerful" and who don't feel privileged:

It is sort of like asking fish to notice water or birds to discuss air. For those who have privilege based on race ... it just is – it's normal.⁷⁰

Yet many poor whites do recognize white racial advantages which for them means being white is preferable to being black. This is clearly illustrated in the story recounted by Kendall of the poor Irish family in the projects of Boston whose mother never ceased to be thankful that they were not black, and was overcome with happiness when the family was moved to the "all-white South Boston housing projects."⁷¹

Similarly, in my experience, many white ethnic immigrants to settler-colonial societies like Australia and New Zealand dismiss 'race' as of no consequence, so the chance of them seeing their white privilege was

⁶⁸ Andersen further asserts the fact that "no white person is seen as representing their race" and indeed that most don't "even think of themselves as raced subjects" which illustrates the normative and taken-for-granted nature of this privilege. M. Andersen, "Whitewashing Race: A Critical Perspective on Whiteness", in Doane & Bonilla-Silva, White Out, pp25-26

⁶⁹ Kendall, Understanding White Privilege, p.63.

⁷⁰ Kendall, Understanding White Privilege, p.22.

⁷¹ Kendall retells the story from Michael Patrick MacDonald's book All Souls: A Family Story from Southie, (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999), p.51. (quoted in Kendall p.35)

rather remote.⁷² The prevailing attitude was shaped by the experience of white immigrant families who began poor and worked hard for everything they achieved in their new home. Hence the insistence that everyone should be able to make it like they did.⁷³

Far from denying or disrespecting the struggles and indeed the prejudice to which white ethnic immigrants were subjected by the white establishment and ruling classes, the point should still be made that relative to nonwhites, white ethnics were given better chances of succeeding. In many situations preferential treatment of white ethnics were evident so privileges and powers associated with white skin colour were well in operation. In employment, for example, the nonwhites (including the indigenous) were steered into demeaning labouring and service jobs (e.g. service and domestic workers) while the white ethnics were given access to manufacturing work in textile, “mills and piecework jobs” that taught them valuable skills and gave them better chances for advancement and economic independence.⁷⁴

⁷² Mills includes among white ethnics those white immigrants usually from Europe, but not from Britain, and traditionally includes the Irish, Jews and Mediterranean. Mills in Doane & Bonilla-Silva, White Out, p.40. Kendall includes Italians, Polish, Irish and Eastern European Jews in this group. Kendall, Understanding White Privilege, p. 93. Dyer clarifies that “white ethnicity” refers to all whites including the British except that there are variations where some are “more securely white than others”, i.e. “there are gradations of whiteness” so that “Latins, Irish and Jews [are] less securely white than Anglos, Teutons and Nordics.” Dyer, White, pp.4,12.

Settler-colonial societies include countries like New Zealand, Australia, South Africa, the US and Canada in that they are “modern and post-modern at once; colonial (with regard to the treatment of their indigenous populations) and (as former British colonies) simultaneously post-colonial; settler and immigrant societies, with multicultural population from all parts of the globe.” Docker & Fischer, Race, Colour & Identity, p.5.

⁷³ Kendall, Understanding White Privilege, p.93.

⁷⁴ In the US context Kendall insists that the experiences of whites and nonwhites were so different both in how people came to the country and in how they were treated once arrived. More to the point, for European

In short, for white ethnic immigrants their skin colour did count in their favour.⁷⁵ Susanne Schech and Jane Haggis conducted a study into the “social construction of whiteness in contemporary Australia” which showed that white ethnic immigrants do quickly construe themselves as white mainstream *battlers* on arrival and do internalize the pervasive racist notion of the Indigenous and Asian *others* as the aliens and therefore the “objects of fear and loathing.”⁷⁶ In other words, for white ethnic immigrants in that context ‘race’ is about *them* not *us*.

Seeing Whiteness

The inability to see difference or whiteness is an experience that I could not relate to as my racialised visible difference deprived me of the luxury of *not seeing*. I was becoming intensely aware of my racialised reality which Mills articulates as a “pervasive racialization of the social world” that shapes and molds one’s whole existence.⁷⁷ My growing consciousness of ‘race’ and racism, of racial disparities and exclusion, of *whiteness* and white privilege, was integral to my reality

immigrants “becoming American” meant buying into the “notion of American blacks as the real aliens.” Kendall, Understanding White Privilege, p 95.

⁷⁵ Kendall reiterates that most white people think that everyone is given the options whites get and are treated as whites are. In short, whites do not believe that they get special treatment and this view is understandably strong amongst poor and recent white immigrants. Nevertheless, experience and history show again and again that having white skin has advantages that are denied to blacks in the US. Kendall, Understanding White Privilege, p.93.

⁷⁶ S. Schech, & J. Haggis, “Migrancy, Whiteness and the Settler Self in Contemporary Australia”, in Docker & Fischer, Race, Colour & Identity, pp.232-3.

⁷⁷ Mills in Doane & Bonilla-Silva, White Out, p.42.

as a nonwhite minority ethnic female migrant in a hegemonic white society and world.⁷⁸

The fact that I have since lived in four different countries across the globe in which having white skin is an asset, in addition to working and traveling in others where a similar valorization of whiteness exist, allows me to contextualize my experiences as global.⁷⁹ Those experiences convinced me that I exist in a racialised global reality in which white people have the power to shape my existence in both micro and macro levels. In the words of Dyer, white people “create the dominant images of the world and do not quite see that they thus construct the world in their own image.”⁸⁰

I live in a world in which the human standard is set by white people with the double impact of dismissing as inferior any valuable nonwhite contribution to setting that standard, as well as requiring nonwhite peoples to learn and to adapt to these white standards if they are to survive in it. Put another way, I am intensely aware that I inhabit a reality in which dark-skinned peoples are often forced to *live* white in

⁷⁸ Battalora defines whiteness in terms of “meanings assigned to those classified racially as white or Caucasian.” That is, whiteness is concerned with what it means to be “racialised white both as a matter of self-definition and as a matter of collective culture” and is a “theoretical tradition” that has evolved out of “critical race theory [in] opposition to dominant conceptions of race, racism, equality and law” with a particular commitment to exploring and exposing how “constructions of whiteness shape and constitute mainstream [western] culture and society.” Battalora in Ruether, Gender, Ethnicity & Religion, p.3.

⁷⁹ From Tonga, to New Zealand, Australia and the UK, and have worked with churches and ecumenical partners and institutions in Europe, North America, Africa, India, Middle-East, the Pacific and Asia.

⁸⁰ Dyer, White, p.9.

order to avoid the less than favourable conditions of life they are fated in a system of white supremacy.⁸¹

In his philosophical analysis of 'race', Mills controversial use of the term *white supremacy* denotes an all-encompassing and multidimensional system of white domination which impact and influence is not limited just to white supremacist forms of racism like the Ku Klux Klan and Neo Nazism.⁸² The point is to expose the more sophisticated, systematic, structural, institutional, habitual and subliminal forms of racism as equally virulent.

Having spent time with indigenous peoples in white settler societies like Australia and New Zealand, with African-Americans in the American South, and with blacks in the townships of Soweto in South Africa, I know that even I cannot begin to imagine the conditions of

⁸¹ Mills' influential analysis of 'race' sees white supremacy as a "multidimensional system of domination" not limited to the "juridico-political realm of official governing bodies and laws" but it also extends to "economic, cultural, cognitive, evaluative, somatic and [even] metaphysical spheres" consistent with Frances L. Ansley's definition of white supremacy as "a political, economic, and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily reenacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings." (quoted in Mills p.37). Mills in Doane & Bonilla-Silva, *White Out*, p.42.

⁸² Mills use of the language of white supremacy is contestable because it is usually associated with a particular virulent kind of white supremacist racism that is exemplified in the KKK and neo-Nazi/fascist groups. However, such unfortunate word association is not sufficient reason to reject the language Mills uses for in my experience the system of white supremacy and domination that both Mills and Ansley discuss is the system that impacts my existence as a nonwhite person every single day in ways imaginable and unimaginable.

life they are forced to face daily due to the history and consequences of white racism in those places.⁸³

My experiences in the schools, at the playgrounds and sports fields, on the streets, in the shops, at the cinema and theatre, on public transport, even at home watching the television, had the common impact of magnifying my difference and heightening my awareness of whiteness.⁸⁴ These public and social spaces were unavoidable socio-cultural and political sites of my exclusion which I entered and engaged daily, and at the end of the day my only reward was an affirmation of my *outsider* status.⁸⁵

In my schooling right through university, and throughout my working life, it was not uncommon to find myself the only nonwhite face in classrooms, boardrooms, workspaces, and other social sites and public spaces filled with white faces. Whilst I often found overt and subtle responses to my difference disturbing in these situations, more

⁸³ In regards to African Americans, James Baldwin wrote: "I can conceive of no Negro native to this country who has not, by the age of puberty, been irreparably scarred by the conditions of his [or her] life." From Baldwin's *Notes of a Native Son*, 1964, p. 72 (quoted in Jordan & Weedon, p.252).

⁸⁴ I knew I was different, I was treated as different, and the problem as I experienced it was not so much that *different* in itself was bad, it was the negative social and material significance attached to my kind of difference and manifested in my alienation and exclusion. Clearly the forms of difference that constitute my categorization as *other* were 'race' and ethnicity and without wishing to add to the reification of either social constructs in trying to explain the "dynamics of difference" the study affirms Ratcliffe's assertion that both concepts continue to "retain pivotal positions in contemporary discourse." Ratcliffe, 'Race' Ethnicity and Difference, p.x.

⁸⁵ Ratcliffe includes "housing, education and the labour market" as sites of exclusion within which "essentialised forms of difference" like ethnicity and 'race' continue to "assume substantive importance." Ratcliffe, 'Race', Ethnicity and Difference, p.44. My experiences as an outsider helps me understand and affirm Jordan and Weedon's contention that discourse is an effective tool in "constituting individuals as subjects, defined positively or negatively in relation to the norms which they privilege." Jordan & Weedon, Cultural Politics, p.15.

distressing was my sense of isolation and absolute *otherness* in the midst of oppressive white bodies and presence. It was a sense of isolation that came from the certainty that most white people in the room were oblivious to their privileged power over my existence even as they casually excluded, dismissed, ridiculed, ignored and feigned indifference to my presence, if they acknowledged me at all.⁸⁶

I was very conscious of an obliviousness (and indifference) to the fact that everything whites deemed normal and took for granted, I had to negotiate and navigate my way through, to adapt and readjust myself to daily, from what and how I dress, to what I eat, what and how I think to what I say and how I say it. I lived and co-existed with white people who were oblivious of the ways in which whiteness works to their advantage in the society and the world. Cheryl Harris describes the functions of whiteness as:

self-identity in the domain of the intrinsic, personal, and psychological; as reputation in the interstices between internal and external identity; and, as property in the extrinsic, public, and legal realms.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Fulkerson defines this sort of obliviousness as a kind of “visceral, non-innocent, reflexive not-seeing” characteristic of human reactions to difference. This kind of not-seeing persists “through cultural constructions of bodies as racialized, gendered, sexualized [which] project all manner of fears and anxieties onto *Othered* bodies” and all the while pretending not to see the difference at all. Fulkerson, Places of Redemption, p.19.

⁸⁷ C. Harris, ‘Whiteness as Property’, in David Roediger (ed.) Black on White: Black Writers on What It Means To Be White, (Chicago: Charles H Kerr Publishing, 1999), p.104.

Amanda Lewis is confident that it is precisely this pervasive nature of whiteness that gives it such a daily taken-for-granted quality and normative power.⁸⁸

On a daily basis I knew I was expected, and indeed I expected myself as a matter of survival, to be fluent in the white language, know white music, read white literature, appreciate white art, respect white lifestyle, accept white values, and understand white socio-economic mindsets and political rules.⁸⁹ Yet, even as I learned and mastered these skills (which had no reciprocal requirement of whites to learn about my reality) there was no guarantee of inclusion or recognition.⁹⁰ It felt as if I didn't exist at all. In other words, I was invisible, which ultimately is the goal of assimilation — to make the *other* invisible.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Such that “the everyday performances and deployments of whiteness are as powerful and consequential as they are subtle and allusive – in fact, they are often powerful and even more consequential precisely because they are hard to see.” A. Lewis, “Some Are More Equal Than Others” in Doane & Bonilla-Silva, White Out, p.170.

⁸⁹ Radio talk-back programmes are common outlets for white people who insist that *they* are in our country and *they* should learn our ways and our language or send *them* back to where *they* came from! Also a recurring view amongst many white church members as I go around raising awareness about racism and multicultural issues. Moreover, citizenship classes for new migrants that lead to “a citizenship ceremony” are a common western government response to such sentiments through immigration policy directives and requirements. Ratcliffe, ‘Race’, Ethnicity and Difference, p. 165. The repetitive naming of *white* is deliberate and for the purpose of reiterating that whites are ‘raced’ too like all other groups. The necessity for me to be as familiar as possible with the varied and complex workings of whiteness was a survival skill that I had to learn quickly as a nonwhite person.

⁹⁰ Ramachandra discusses the experience of Indian-British psychologist, Pittu Lungani, who described it as an “expectation that [he] would be knowledgeable about western values, including music, art, poetry, drama and literature” but there was no reciprocal expectation that his colleagues should learn anything about his culture. Ramachandra, Subverting Global Myths, p.128.

⁹¹ A fuller discussion of this notion of invisibility follows. Ramachandra helpfully describes this as existing under the “overpowering shadow of the dominant culture” and the associated “relentless assimilationist pressure” that goes with it. Ramachandra, Subverting Global Myths, p.148.

The stunning irony dawned on me that my very visible difference had something to do with my being rendered invisible. On countless occasions, I've had the unsettling experience of walking into a meeting knowing that my stereotyped Polynesian grass-skirt-wearing hula-dancer self had already preceded me.⁹² And it never took long for someone to suggest that I perform some aspect of my stereotyped self. Any substantial contribution that I could possibly make to the meeting was dismissed or ignored. This experience of invisibility is consistent with what David Goldberg refers to as "racialized expression [that] fixes social subjects in place and time, no matter their location, to delimit privilege and possibilities."⁹³ It is that similar kind of invisibility that my black friend and former colleague in the UK experienced when he was often stopped by the police whilst driving his BMW — an experience well-known amongst black communities in that context as DWB.⁹⁴ For my British friend, his stereotyped black-poor-criminal self was all the traffic police could see in these situations.

⁹² Being tall with long dark hair and brown skin, from seventeen years old onwards, I was overburdened with the popular exoticized image of Polynesian women of the South Seas as nothing more than grass-skirt hula dancing girls, a notion held mostly by white males in my experience, from fellow university students to lecturers and teachers, to employers to church ministers and leaders. I constantly had to dispel such notions, and I found it debilitating and exhausting trying to transcend these deeply damaging and limiting imposition on who I am and what I am. I never ceased to be exasperated with the two common reactions to me in discussions or meetings when I would open my mouth and something articulate comes out: i) the shock and surprise that I actually have something sensible to say and contribute; ii) the glazed-over look which means that I've not been heard at all and often immediately after another (usually a white male) would repeat what I've just said to nods of assent as if I've said nothing at all, i.e. like I was invisible!

⁹³ D. Goldberg, *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), p.206.

⁹⁴ Driving While Black.

I had stumbled onto the great paradox of 'race' where the nonwhite other is all too visible yet quite invisible, and the white-self is seemingly invisible yet all too visible.⁹⁵ The ability of whiteness to be simultaneously invisible yet visible has everything to do with its powerful privileged position. To have that kind of ubiquitous presence and influence whilst seemingly absent is powerful indeed. As Dyer puts it, "the invisibility of whiteness is of a piece with its ubiquity" which means that whiteness as racial privilege is always present yet absent.⁹⁶ In short, whiteness is always everywhere yet nowhere in particular.

I felt as if Dyer was speaking directly to my own experience, and it was a huge relief to read his words giving credence to what I experienced daily but struggled to express convincingly to others. The fact that a white person could see what I see and give such graphically accurate descriptions to them gave me hope. Black writers and theorists have given plenty of attention over the years to this reality of whiteness and white dominance but they have largely been ignored or vilified for their effort.⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Dyer clearly understands this paradox as is reflected in his view that the "ultimate position of power in a society that controls people in part through their visibility is that of invisibility." Dyer, White, p.44.

⁹⁶ Dyer, White, p.3.

⁹⁷ Mills credits black and African-American writers from Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton (1967) to Malcolm X (1971) with such insights that were ahead of their time but which were dismissed by mainstream white political theory as "naïve". Mills in Doane & Bonilla-Silva, White Out, p.42. Other Black and African-American writers are listed in the bibliography including bell hooks, David Roediger, and Toni Morrison.

The general absence of dark-skinned representations in the public realm was one very stark example of white dominant presence for me. I felt keenly a lack of visible reflections of *me*. And I consciously sought to find any representations of something that I could relate to. My own experiences of exclusion and marginalization as a nonwhite migrant in the western context have made me so keenly attuned to such *lacking* to the present day. In Dyer's words:

Research — into books, museums, the press, advertising, films, television, software — repeatedly shows that in Western representation whites are overwhelmingly and disproportionately predominant, have the central and elaborated roles, and above all are placed as the norm, the ordinary, the standard.⁹⁸

Every time I turned on the television, for example, there would be a white woman or man hosting a show, reporting the latest news, acting the main characters in a movie, or floating across the screen in some advert as visions of [white] beauty in all its glorious universalizing norms projected as the beauty standards for all.

Jordan and Weedon reflect on the fact that contemporary images of beauty in Hollywood movies and in fashion magazines are predominantly white.⁹⁹ Likewise on film, in magazines, newspapers and billboards the images of ability, professionalism, reliability,

⁹⁸ Dyer, *White*, p.3.

⁹⁹ They recount the story of Thomas Jefferson, the so-called “father of American democracy [and] great champion of human equality” who obviously had no problems living with self-contradictions since he owned many slaves and whilst he publicly upheld an “idealised image of white womanhood as the universal standard of beauty” he was keeping a mixed-race slave woman in a sexual relationship from which several children were born. Jordan & Weedon, *Cultural Politics*, p.260.

achievement, intelligence, mental and physical health, morality, good leadership, political nous and statesmanship, democracy, goodness, charity and generosity, in short, of the ideal human, were without exception white. Battalora includes in her experiences the fact that she regularly sees “standards of intelligence, beauty, and sophistication defined by men and women” of her skin colour.¹⁰⁰

It bothered me that the indigenous peoples of Australia and New Zealand were not more visibly represented or recognized in public. In politics and government leadership, in the news media and film, in the classrooms and boardrooms, it seemed everywhere I looked there was a lack of images that represented indigenous peoples — or at least none that were positive. Indigenous characters and dark-skinned peoples in general, seemed to me to be overly represented in the news media when crimes were reported. In the Australian context Peter Gale highlights the role of the media in the continuing production of racist narratives that demonise the nonwhite, in this case, the Aboriginal other.¹⁰¹ Lewis discusses Katheryn Russell’s book *The Colour of Crime* to make the powerful point that while such narratives and representations negatively target nonwhites systematically, they

¹⁰⁰ Battalora in Ruether, Gender, Ethnicity & Religion, p.8.

¹⁰¹ He focuses on the Australian media’s production and reproduction of “narratives of fear” and representations of “oppositional binary between whiteness and the [Aboriginal] other”, which represents the Aboriginal as threat and conflict for white Australia. P. Gale, “Construction of Whiteness in the Australian Media”, in Docker & Fischer, Race, Colour & Identity, pp.257-59.

simultaneously positively portray whites as innocent human beings who are thereby deserved –

Beneficiaries of discriminatory behaviour on their behalf, affirmative actions of various sorts that regularly give them the benefit of the doubt, allow them to get away with questionable if not illegal behavior, and provide them with the ability to move through the world (and down highways, through stores, and into the executive suite) relatively unencumbered.¹⁰²

I found the same lack of nonwhite positive representations in the arts and in the school curricula. The literature I was expected to study in school, the languages available for learning, the history I was expected to know, all had the common feature of being about white people and their achievements and abilities.

There were rare exceptions, particularly in the field of sports where dark faces and bodies featured with some regularity and more positively. As a young person consciously seeking such positive role models to relate to and that would help me feel less invisible, I tended to rejoice at any positive images of dark peoples. Later of course, I came to realise the underlying limiting impositions associated with images of sporting prowess located in and projected through dark bodies.¹⁰³ As Goldberg puts it:

¹⁰² She notes in Kathryn Russell's book *The Color of Crime* the juxtaposition between the "assumption of white innocent" against the "assumption of black criminality" to highlight the representation of the "criminalblackman" [sic] image with its flip side of the "innocentwhite" [sic] as both "pervasive, destructive [and] corrosive." Lewis in Doane & Bonilla-Silva, *White Out*, pp.170-71.

¹⁰³ Jordan & Weedon discuss the pervasive racist notion that "black people are only physical" and the often "unconscious racism of school teachers, counselors and coaches" in American colleges who think they are doing what is best for African-American students by channeling them into track and field, basketball and

The stereotype that blacks tend to be good entertainers or sportsmen and sportswomen will warrant for the racist that blacks have little intellectual capacity – that they need affirmative action programs to get ahead yet often still fail.¹⁰⁴

These experiences caused me to question who I was and my place in this world – where I fit in, if at all. I began to question my own sense of self. I wondered how I could continue to exist and survive in a world in which racial disparities and injustices are daily realities with “various emotional, spiritual, psychic, symbolic and material resources made scarce to some racial groups and more available to others.”¹⁰⁵ A world where my sense of belonging is constantly at issue, a world that constantly questions my validity as a human being who happens to be a nonwhite female, where I constantly have to fight to be heard and taken seriously, and where I can never relax and just be me.¹⁰⁶ I found myself struggling with self-doubt and self-esteem on a far too regular basis.

Further, watching my parents reduced to shadows of their former selves as they submit and surrender themselves daily to racist subordination, I wondered about the wisdom of swapping our life in Tonga, with our own land and roof over our heads, and most of all our

other sporting opportunities, convinced that academic subjects are not for them but for whites only. Jordan & Weedon, Cultural Politics, p.258.

¹⁰⁴ Goldberg, Racist Culture, p.208.

¹⁰⁵ Battalora in Ruether, Gender, Ethnicity & Religion, p.4.

¹⁰⁶ bell hooks famously coined the phrase “white people fatigue syndrome” (wpfs) to describe the condition many nonwhites suffer from (and I include myself in those so inflicted) because of having to survive and cope with white supremacy and dominance both in “the world at large” and in the “world of our intimate interactions.” b. hooks, “Representations of Whiteness in the Black Imagination”, in Roediger, Black on White, p. 52.

self-respect intact, for this demeaning existence. I understood these were sacrifices courageously made in the hope that opportunities for building capacity to flourish in a globalised world and future may be available to me. That understanding fueled a mixture of guilt and growing anger that threatened to overwhelm me. I felt helpless to challenge racial disparities in the face of white obliviousness and the claim to “racial neutrality”.¹⁰⁷

The presumption that “whites are non-raced” may account for the widespread misconception amongst many white people that “most social and legal rules and practices [are] racially point-of-view-less or neutral.”¹⁰⁸ Ramachandra disputes the notion of a culturally neutral state that produces neutral laws as “a fantasy” and he urges “open recognition of this fact” as the necessary “first step to reconfiguring the nature of politics” in a multicultural society.¹⁰⁹ According to Battalora this presumed white racial neutrality is “the product of the perceptual trick that keeps whiteness from being seen.”¹¹⁰ Certainly, it is the hardest and most exhausting challenge to subvert what is unacknowledged, not seen and in Mills’ words:

... a non-knowing which is not the innocent unawareness of truths to which there is no access but a self- and social shielding from racial realities that is underwritten by the official social epistemology.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷In my experience the most widely held misconception about ‘race’ is its exclusive association with nonwhite people. Battalora recounts the common and recurring mistake made in academia and in the mass media of talking about ‘race’ as meaning *nonwhites* but is a non-issue when whites are involved. Battalora in Ruether, Gender, Ethnicity & Religion, p.6.

¹⁰⁸ Battalora in Ruether, Gender, Ethnicity & Religion, p.6.

¹⁰⁹ Ramachandra, Subverting Global Myths, p. 143.

¹¹⁰ Battalora in Ruether, Gender, Ethnicity & Religion, p.7.

¹¹¹ Mills in Doane & Bonilla-Silva, White Out, p.45.

For Dyer this presumption is “endemic to white culture” and it implies that whites are normal people while nonwhites are not so that in habitual conversations and interactions the latter is racialised while the former is not.¹¹² So for example the *Chineseness* of the nonwhite person is mentioned while the whiteness of the white person is not.

Anger was beginning to consume me, and without an appropriate external outlet there was every possibility that I was on track to self-implosion or to self-destruction. However, my parents’ fortitude constantly reminded me to “never forget who I am and where I came from.”¹¹³ Inspired by their conviction that racism diminishes the humanity of the perpetrator not the victim’s, I realised that I needed to follow Kyung’s wisdom to “take my anger seriously and channel it not at myself, but use it to enhance my passion for justice.”¹¹⁴ In the profound words of Goldberg:

It involves nothing short of assuming power: the power of the racialised, of the racially excluded and marginalized, to articulate for themselves and to represent for others who they are and what they want, where they come from, how they see

¹¹² Dyer, *White*, p.2.

¹¹³ Both my parents took pains to instill in me this notion of who I am and where I came from, which created a strong foundation for my sense of *self*. But I sensed over the years that they often used this teaching not just to encourage me but to remind themselves of who they were as well, and to help boost their own courage and resolve. Both came from Tongan paramount chief families (Ma’afu of Vaini & Nuku of Kolonga) with very clear notions of rights and responsibilities rooted in justice, honour, and respect. To go from dignified proud Tongan to being treated like the *white man’s* doormat must have been traumatic for them. I only ever saw steely inner strength and dignity in their behaviour, and never a sign of bitterness from either one of them.

¹¹⁴ Kyung, *Struggle to be the Sun*, p.xii.

themselves incorporated into the body politic, and how they see the social body reflecting them.¹¹⁵

Kyung's sense of anger and frustration gave her the impetus to "de-educate" her self from western oriented education and training and to be re-educated by the spiritual wisdom of her own people."¹¹⁶

Empowered by Goldberg's words and Kyung's example, I resolved that a priority for me in dealing with my anger constructively was intentionally to engage in deepening my understanding of the nature and origin of 'race'. I hoped that a better understanding would help me make a constructive contribution to combating racial injustices. Since the inclusive community I seek continues to be elusive, I became even more resolute that my most useful response would be to work to combat racism and racial injustices in any way I can.

Understanding White Supremacy

I quickly learned that amongst social and critical race theorists there is yet to be a consensus about the origin of 'race' as exclusion and a method of human categorization and differentiation, though most would "locate its genesis in the modern period."¹¹⁷ Ratcliffe

¹¹⁵ Goldberg, Racist Culture, p.237.

¹¹⁶ Kyung, Struggle to be the Sun, p.xii..

¹¹⁷ Mills in Doane & Bonilla-Silva, White Out, p.38. Lewis notes that 'race', in addition to being a means of differentiation, is also an "instrument of communication and knowledge" because as a "signifying

documents the work of highly influential social theorists like Cesaire (1972) and Memmi (1974) to support the view that 'race' as such was the product of European colonialism.¹¹⁸ Seshadri-Crooks makes the critical point that such views must be careful not to attribute the origin of the "racial logic [to] European encounter with non-Europeans" because the former "were always already subjected to the regime of racial looking prior to their encounters with so-called "peoples of colour."¹¹⁹ Both scientists and social theorists now insist that 'race' is a nonsensical concept and most like Seshadri-Crooks assume that it is now "commonplace to utter rote phrases [such as] race is a construct and does not exist."¹²⁰

However, the fact that 'race' is a social construct has made little impact on racism. Racial practices continue to thrive in their varied forms and in Seshadri-Crooks' words, "race itself shows no evidence of disappearing or evaporating in relevance."¹²¹ Ratcliffe too is clear that in the 21st century 'race' is in "common everyday usage [and] reified formally by official discursive representations" so it continues to be current.¹²²

system" it purports to "tell us something about people before we even know them" and it is "an instrument of domination that sorts and ranks groups." Lewis in Doane & Bonilla-Silva, *White Out*, p.171.

¹¹⁸ Ratcliffe, *'Race', Ethnicity and Difference*, p.20.

¹¹⁹ K. Seshadri-Crooks, *Desiring Whiteness: A Lacanian Analysis of Race*, (London: Routledge, 2000), p.49.

¹²⁰ Seshadri-Crooks, *Desiring Whiteness*, p.4.

¹²¹ She acknowledges the enduring existence of 'race'. *ibid.*

¹²² As with other critical 'race' theorists, Ratcliffe also asserts the continuing prominence of race. Ratcliffe, *'Race', Ethnicity & Difference*, p. 24.

To date, debates are ongoing as to how, or if at all, 'race' can be dismantled. I am interested in understanding how an apparently "non-sense and irrational" concept, in Seshadri-Crooks words, continues to be resilient and holds currency today.¹²³ Interestingly, Goldberg is of the opinion that we cannot rid ourselves of 'race' and 'racism' simply by dismissing them as irrational for we risk missing a central condition of racialised relations which is power.¹²⁴ The implication here is that the apparent endurance of 'race' and racism may possibly be due to the fact that they are dismissed as irrational, and we may have to accept that some interpretation of racism is rational for we cannot just wish away by definition such an enduring feature of contemporary social reality.¹²⁵

To that end, Mills' critical philosophical approach to 'race' offers valuable insights. Appropriately, he grounds his analysis in philosophy's tradition as a "highly subversive discipline" committed to "understanding the human condition."¹²⁶ Specifically, he considers how a system of white supremacy "shapes and moulds humans into whites and nonwhites" and he maps its "origin, evolution, scope and dimensions."¹²⁷ This mirrors contemporary drives by social scientists

¹²³ Seshadri-Crooks, Desiring Whiteness, p. 2.

¹²⁴ Goldberg, Racist Culture, p.94.

¹²⁵ *ibid.*

¹²⁶ Mills is firm in his commitment to exposing the "conceptual whiteness of mainstream philosophy." Mills in Doane & Bonilla-Silva, White Out, p.36.

¹²⁷ He suggests that white supremacy should be taken seriously as a "theoretical object in its own right", i.e. "a global social system" as significant as "class system" or a system of "patriarchy". *ibid.*

like Battalora to expose whiteness for the racialised group interest that it really is and thereby dismantle 'race' which is seen as a euphemism for white supremacy.¹²⁸

Mills' conceptualisation of white supremacy begins by recognising the that white supremacy, the term already in use to denote "white domination over nonwhites," was not abolished post-slavery, post-colonialism, post-civil rights movement, post-apartheid in South Africa, or post-white policies in western settler societies.¹²⁹ For Mills there is no denying the truth that "power relations can survive the formal dismantling of their more overt support" so white supremacy simply "changed from *de jure* to *de facto* form" during periods of strong resistance to white domination.¹³⁰

Mill's focus on white supremacy also reveals the fact that the rules can change "as to who is counted as white" allowing for previously excluded groups (e.g. Irish and Jews) to become white over time.¹³¹ Dyer points out that given the privilege and power of whiteness, who is counted as white and who did not was an issue worth fighting

¹²⁸ Battalora promotes white racial cognizance as a "reorientation to race which racialises whiteness" thereby allowing white people to recognize and acknowledge the "racialness of their own experiences." Battalora in Ruether, Gender, Ethnicity & Religion, p.7. Ratcliffe emphasizes the important and critical point that any approach to 'race' must not be "divorced from the wider power dynamic which is responsible in large part" for putting 'race' in the prominent position it is in. Ratcliffe, 'Race', Ethnicity and Difference, p.23.

¹²⁹ He highlights these significant historical periods to map the history of white domination over *nonwhite* peoples. Mills in Doane & Bonilla-Silva, White Out, p.36.

¹³⁰ *ibid.*.

¹³¹ Mills in Doane & Bonilla-Silva, White Out, p.39.

about.¹³² In the case of the Irish and Jews, two groups who historically have been categorized as black and swarthy respectively, the Irish - largely through British colonization and immigration to white settler societies - have achieved the status of white as against the *nonwhite* natives, slaves and indigenous peoples of these lands; and though the racial difference of the Jews was always widely assumed there was a countervailing view that Jews were the most “adaptive people par excellence” as they seemed to vary in “appearance according to geography.”¹³³ The point is that in the not too distant past the Irish in Britain and the Jews in Nazi Germany were regarded as black, but today it would be a shock to these groups to find themselves so labeled in any western society.¹³⁴

In terms of its origin, Mills asserts that white European domination over nonwhites in non-European parts of the globe began with European colonialism and expansionism and persists today in “Euro-American military, economic, cultural” and political mechanisms.¹³⁵ In scope, this makes white supremacy a global reality. Dyer concurs by

¹³² Dyer, *White*, p.52.

¹³³ Dyer, *White*, p.54.

¹³⁴ Dyer, *White*, p.57.

¹³⁵ He draws on Frank Furedi (1998), to reiterate that prior to WWII “most of the planet was ruled by white nations who, on colonial questions were united on maintaining the subordination of nonwhites” and to recount the “embarrassing” story of the “Japanese proposal to include the equality of races in the League of Nations’ Covenant” at the 1919 Versailles Conference which was resoundingly rejected. Mills on Doane & Bonilla-Silva, *White Out*, p.37.

referencing David Lloyd's (1991) analysis of 'race' in the history of colonization to denote the "global ubiquity of the white European."¹³⁶

Seshadri-Crooks draws on Samir Amin (1989), Martin Bernal (1987) and Edward Said (1995) to highlight the "reinvention of Europe — as rational, humanist, secular, individualist, progressive — with roots in classical Greek" and out of which was formed the "Eurocentric nexus of universalism, capitalism and racism."¹³⁷

The consensus here is that the reinvented and racialised Europe created the "myth of Greek ancestry" to further validate Europe's so-called unique capitalist achievement.¹³⁸ This reinvention process also "misappropriated Greek language and culture from its Afro-Asiatic roots [and] Levantine context" enabling Europe to assert a direct link to classical Greek which bolstered the Eurocentric ideology and allowed for the "racist dichotomy between the European *self* and the Oriental *other*."¹³⁹ Said's seminal work on *Orientalism* not only demonstrated the systematic construction of the "Oriental other" through various western discourses and institutions, it also revealed how Europe was able to strengthen its culture and identity "by setting

¹³⁶ Dyer, White, p.38.

¹³⁷ She has no doubts about the Eurocentric drive to secure a link between "classical Greece and contemporary Europe." Seshadri-Crooks, Desiring Whiteness, p.48.

¹³⁸ *ibid.*

¹³⁹ She draws on Amin's work to highlight the fact that much of the Greek language came from "Egyptian and Phoenician tongues" but this had to be masked somehow as "opposition between the Indo-European and the Semitic (Arab and Hebrew) families of languages" to secure the *myth* central to Eurocentrism – the "Aryan purity of Greece." Seshadri-Crooks, Desiring Whiteness, p.48.

itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self."¹⁴⁰ This construction shaped the framing of the "west and the rest" dichotomy.¹⁴¹ Hall & Gieben give an account of the remarkable formulation of the "west and the rest discourse" where the west represents "civilisation, refinement, modernity and development" while the *other* (i.e. the rest) was the "reverse image of enlightenment and modernity."¹⁴²

Mills' notion of white supremacy ensures that power relations and domination are not left out of the "official definition of the political" which is how whiteness has been able to become "conceptually invisible."¹⁴³ This is a fundamental "paradigm shift" that sees white supremacy replace the "hegemonic race-relations paradigm."¹⁴⁴ It is a paradigm shift that reinstates "racial domination and subordination in the centre of socio-political theory and discourse."¹⁴⁵ In Mills' analysis this paradigm shift avoids "conflating the experience of assimilating, ambiguously off-white, European ethnics (Irish, Jewish, Mediterranean) with the radically different experience of subordinated,

¹⁴⁰ E. Said, Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient, (London: Penguin Books, 1995). p.296.

¹⁴¹The "west and the rest discourse" continues to shape the west's "image of itself and others" and most destructively in the continuing racial inferiorisation of the other that "still operate so powerfully across the globe today." Hall & Gieben, Formations of Modernity, p.296.

¹⁴² Hall & Gieben, Formations of Modernity, p.314.

¹⁴³ Mills in Doane & Bonilla-Silva, White Out, p.40.

¹⁴⁴ Until now the race-relations paradigm has confined race discourse to sociology, treating it as nonpolitical, ignoring the role "political forces play in the creation and shaping" of 'race' and how 'race' is used as the "vehicle of political power." *ibid*.

¹⁴⁵More to the point, Ratcliffe resists the tendency of the race –relations paradigm to project relations between racial-ethnic groups themselves as the core problem when in fact it is "the wider power dynamic which is responsible in large part for such relations." Ratcliffe, 'Race', Ethnicity and Difference, p.23.

unambiguously nonwhite non-European races (black, red, brown, yellow).¹⁴⁶

Shifting the focus to systematic structural and power dynamics exposes “individualized prejudice [and] reverse discrimination” as obfuscating processes that have successfully masked the very “enduring system of white power itself.”¹⁴⁷ Hence, the polity is reframed as a “white-supremacist state” instead of the mythical “raceless liberal democracy” that it pretends to be, and therefore ‘race’ is not reduced simply to “class logic”.¹⁴⁸ This means that individual, cultural, juridical, economic, and group interests are together taken into account, exposing ‘race’ as “more real, causally effective [and] institutionalized by white supremacy in social practices.”¹⁴⁹ Seshadri-Crooks refers to this as “the material effects of race as political, existential and historical fact.”¹⁵⁰

Emphasizing the all-encompassing reach of white supremacy as a “multidimensional system of domination” Mills details its shaping

¹⁴⁶ Mills, p.40.. Conflating such different experiences was a mistake that the classical “race-relations paradigm” made. Like Mills, Kendall agrees that these experiences are not only different but are also “not analogous.” Kendall, Understanding White Privilege, p.94.

¹⁴⁷ Mills highlights the fundamental problem with these approaches that treat individual prejudice and racist actions as completely independent and disconnected from the “social fabric and without historical continuity.” Mills in Doane & Bonilla-Silva, White Out, p.41.

¹⁴⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ Mills resists “mainstream theory’s ghettoizing of the work on race” and insists that “the white-supremacist state [is] a system as real and important [as] any acknowledged in the western political canon [like] aristocracy, absolutism, democracy, fascism, socialism” and so on. Mills in Doane & Bonilla-Silva, White Out, p.40.

¹⁵⁰ Seshadri-Crooks, Desiring Whiteness, p.46.

influence in six key areas.¹⁵¹ In the *juridico-political sphere* the state and legal system play key roles in the systematic subjugation of nonwhites that include “overtly racist legislations, majoritarianism [and] official and unofficial white violence.”¹⁵² Docker and Fischer highlight similar ways that white supremacy was secured in other white settler societies like South Africa, Australia and New Zealand.¹⁵³ Mills documents the *economic* exploitation of *nonwhites* at both national and global levels that “constitute the material base of white supremacy.”¹⁵⁴ Hall & Gieben note the escalating debate in the social sciences today as many western scholars now question the presumed “historically inevitable and necessarily progressive character of the west’s expansion into the rest.”¹⁵⁵

¹⁵¹ The six areas consist of: the juridico-political, the economic, cultural, cognitive, somatic and metaphysical spheres. Mills in Doane & Bonilla-Silva, *White Out*, p.42.

¹⁵² In the history of the US alone, the subordination of the *nonwhites* particularly the enslaved Africans was legally codified and with the full cooperation of the state. In addition, majoritarianism in such societies was and is always available as a means of maintaining white supremacy under the guise of “democratic process” since the white majority group interests will always “reproduce white domination” especially when no resistance is forthcoming from both white dominated legal justice systems and white dominated states. Mills insists on taking account of both overt and covert state sanctioning of white violence toward nonwhites as means of perpetuating white supremacy. There’s the use of principles of liberty and freedom to allow groups like the KKK to operate freely “lynching and terrorizing” blacks in the US not to mention the “differential application of the laws of the land to whites and nonwhites” like the death penalty. Mills in Doane & Bonilla-Silva, *White Out*, p. 43.

¹⁵³ Docker & Fischer, *Race, Colour & Identity*, pp.6-7.

¹⁵⁴ The economic means of maintaining white supremacy clearly illustrates the local and global reach of this system. The “racial exploitation” of *nonwhites* in both formal and informal means is obvious but to the willingly blind, and in the case of the US these include exploitation of native, black and Asian “coolie” labour and restricted access to job opportunities, better education, housing and to fair business contracts to name a few. Globally it is not too much of a stretch to see the claim that “slavery, colonialism and the exploitation” of nonwhite peoples and their lands were “crucial in enabling European development and producing African [and other colonized peoples’] underdevelopment.” Mills in Doane & Bonilla-Silva, *White Out*, p.44.

¹⁵⁵ They cannot deny the power of discourses in their ability to “shape perceptions and practice” and even more disturbing, their tendency to “carry unconscious premises and unexamined assumptions in their blood-stream” which is exactly the case in the discourse of white supremacy and of the “west and the rest.” Hall & Gieben, *Formations of Modernity*, pp.314, 317.

Culturally Mills draws attention to the pervasive “Eurocentric master-narrative” that valorizes European culture and appropriates the material, intellectual and spiritual treasures of other world civilizations and cultures “without acknowledgement.”¹⁵⁶ This feeds an embedded sense of “white cultural superiority” that is evident in the attitudes of many white people and permeates all aspects of life so that the clear message conveyed (whether intentionally or unconsciously) is that civilization is the exclusive property of white people and only they “have the capacity for culture.”¹⁵⁷

Keen to unmask the shaping influences of white epistemologies in reproducing white hegemony and power, Mills exposes racist ideology in its various “historical, theological and *scientific* forms” including the so-called *Ham Myth* and the *Bell Curve*.¹⁵⁸ He notes characteristic patterns of white *cognition* that mask what are “structured white ignorance, motivated inattention, self-deception and moral rationalization.”¹⁵⁹ Moreover, since for Mills whiteness has assumed the position of “normative reference point” for humanity, he is convinced of the inevitability of white epistemic hegemony infecting “nonwhite cognition”.¹⁶⁰ As Dyer puts it, “whites are not of a certain

¹⁵⁶ Mills wants more theoretical attention given to this “cultural appropriation without acknowledgment” which he sees as “a form of exploitation.” Mills in Doane & Bonilla-Silva, *White Out*, p.45.

¹⁵⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ Mills in Doane & Bonilla-Silva, *White Out*, p. 46.

¹⁶⁰ *ibid.* Mills is concerned that nonwhites develop cognitive skills that help them resist white epistemic processes that make nonwhites either accept or even complicit in their own subordination.

race, they're just the human race."¹⁶¹ For their own survival Mills encourages the "racially subordinated" to be discerning of whiteness' ability to be absent yet forever present in order to avoid being co-opted into, and trapped in, the white processes of obfuscation that may mask or justify their subordination."¹⁶²

Not surprisingly a "white *somatic* ideal" has prevailed in a "political system predicated on racial superiority and inferiority."¹⁶³ The resulting denigration and stigmatization of nonwhite bodies have been catastrophic for its alienation of nonwhites from their own bodies — evident in "attempts to transform the body to more closely approximate the white somatic ideal."¹⁶⁴ The African-American comedian Chris Rock had recently made a documentary film on African-American women's hair and the extent to which many would go to make their hair look more like white women's hair.¹⁶⁵ Dyer notes how the late pop star Michael Jackson's alleged attempts to lighten his skin and the "disfigurement of his face" were constantly ridiculed in the press as his attempts to become white.¹⁶⁶ Interestingly, as Dyer points out, it has been a common practice of white people to darken their skin through tanning and yet they are not

¹⁶¹ Dyer, *White*, p.3.

¹⁶² Mills in Doane & Bonilla-Silva, *White Out*, p.46.

¹⁶³ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ *ibid.* Other examples include black women who are changing their natural fuzzy hair to more approximate the flowing soft hair associated with the white somatic ideal.

¹⁶⁵ See Chris Rock's 'Good Hair' reviewed in the New York Times by Jeannette Catsouli, 8 Oct 2009, <<http://movies.nytimes.com/2009/10/09/movies/09hair.html>> (August 2012).

¹⁶⁶ Dyer, *White*, p.50.

being ridiculed as trying to pass themselves off as black.¹⁶⁷ If anything they are perceived as people with means and the right to “incorporate into themselves features of other peoples.”¹⁶⁸

Sally Morgan gives a very moving account of this kind of black alienation from their bodies in the experience of an Australian Aboriginal:

When I was little, mum had always pinched my nose and said, “Pull your nose, Gladdie, pull it hard. You don’t want to end up with a big nose like mine.” She was always pulling the kids’ noses, too. She wanted them to grow up to look like white people.¹⁶⁹

This kind of alienation from one’s body is especially destructive for the very fact that one can never “get out of one’s skin” and any attempt to do so is bound to be catastrophic.¹⁷⁰

Finally, Mills insists on a social ontology and discourse that more accurately reflect the “centrality of racial *inegalitarianism* [to] the *metaphysics* of white supremacy.”¹⁷¹ Indeed, he dismisses any “social theory whose implicit ontology” fails to acknowledge the fact that the racial subordination of nonwhites is predicated on their being

¹⁶⁷ Dyer, White, p.49.

¹⁶⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ Morgan, My Place, p. 305.

¹⁷⁰ Mills’ emphasis here is on a notion of alienation that is “far more fundamental” than Marx’s idea of alienation in a class system, because as he sees it, however alienated one is from one’s labour, at the end of the day one can always leave work and go home. Mills in Doane & Bonilla-Silva, White Out, p.47.

¹⁷¹ Mills in Doane & Bonilla-Silva, White Out, p.48.

perceived and treated as subhuman.¹⁷² Hall & Gieben note that the inferiorisation of the nonwhites at the global level was embedded in the west and rest discourse with the use of west-rest contrasting oppositions in terms of “civilized-rude, developed-backward” to convey this less-than-human image of the *other*.¹⁷³ As Jordan and Weedon put it:

The practice of viciously exploiting the labour of people of colour – Africans, Asians, American Indians ... – in the European colonies of the Old World and the New, could not have continued without ideological justification: one cannot treat other human beings like animals without believing – eventually at least – that they somehow belong to a lesser order.¹⁷⁴

Contrary to the mainstream view, Mills asserts that the Enlightenment’s real contribution to human equality was to achieve an “undifferentiated equality” which was characteristically blind to the reality that “whiteness was a prerequisite for full personhood.”¹⁷⁵ But Emmanuel Eze exposes the fact that even Mills is quiet over the fact that a significant component of Enlightenment thought and discourses in the eighteenth century focused on ‘race’.¹⁷⁶

Eze is mystified by this silence among contemporary theorists since enlightenment thinkers like Immanuel Kant wrote extensively on

¹⁷² Mills in Doane & Bonilla-Silva, *White Out*, p.48.

¹⁷³ They note the even more significant point that this dualism highlights the necessity of the *rest* for the west’s ability “to recognize and represent itself as the summit of human history.” Hall & Gieben, *Formations of Modernity*, p.316.

¹⁷⁴ Jordan & Weedon, *Cultural Politics*, p. 257.

¹⁷⁵ Mills in Doane & Bonilla-Silva, *White Out*, p.47.

¹⁷⁶ Emmanuel Eze (ed) *Race and the Enlightenment*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), p.2.

race.¹⁷⁷ Eze is confident about Kant's preoccupation with 'race' given that the latter taught seventy-two courses in anthropology and geography throughout his career and he published five essays on the topic of 'race'.¹⁷⁸ Strangely, many who studied his work like Heidegger and Foucault never mentioned Kant's "theories on race or his work on cross-cultural anthropology."¹⁷⁹ This is especially intriguing given the key role the Enlightenment played in the inferiorisation of the non-European *other*. Eze explains:

... the Enlightenment declaration of itself as the "Age of Reason" was predicated upon precisely the assumption that reason could historically only come to maturity in modern Europe, while the inhabitants of areas outside Europe, who were considered to be of non-European racial and cultural origins, were consistently described and theorized as rationally inferior and savage.¹⁸⁰

As an undergraduate student of philosophy I was never taught this critical aspect of the Enlightenment story. I did not get a whole picture of who these philosophers were. I was taught they were great shapers of human civilization, and they stood for human equality and liberty. I valorized them as luminaries of the Enlightenment, inspired by their commitment to human freedom and equality as glimmers of hope for racially subordinated human beings like me. So it was profoundly unsettling to discover that works by Enlightenment philosophers like Hume, Kant and Hegel really did promote Europeans (i.e. whites) as

¹⁷⁷ Eze documents Kant's active theorizing about 'race' including his introduction of geography to the university curriculum. Eze, Race and the Enlightenment, p.2.

¹⁷⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ It is this incredible silence that motivated Eze to publish his book. Eze, Race and the Enlightenment, p.3.

¹⁸⁰ Eze, Race and the Enlightenment, p.4.

racially and culturally superior “while unreason and savagery were conveniently located among the non-whites, the black, the red, the yellow, outside Europe.”¹⁸¹ In short, people like me!

The realization that the Enlightenment ideals of *Liberte Egalite Fraternité* were not meant to apply to *nonwhites* like me, and that Enlightenment philosophy was actually instrumental in “codifying and institutionalizing” my racial inferiority and subordination left me with a deep sense of betrayal.¹⁸² This is an experience that was very familiar to the colonized as described by John Docker:

The colonized, believing or trying to believe and act on the rhetoric of the European colonizers that such Enlightenment ideals are universal for humanity, have been continuously betrayed.¹⁸³

This discovery represented another significant moment of personal crisis, which only fueled my determination to direct my intense disappointment towards anti-racism strategies and activities. I hoped that such discovery would increase my capacity to be alert to the risk of being co-opted by white supremacist processes and frameworks that obfuscate my racial subordination.

¹⁸¹ Eze is clear that their writings greatly influenced Europe’s sense of its “cultural and racial superiority.” Eze, Race and the Enlightenment, p.5.

¹⁸² Docker & Fischer, Race, Colour & Identity, p. 7. Eze includes in his book an excerpt from Kant’s work *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (1764) where Kant discusses “national characteristics” as shaped by each nation’s (read ‘race’) intellectual capacity for the aesthetic and moral qualities of the “beautiful and the sublime”. Drawing on Hume’s work and his own observations Kant ranks the African at the very bottom for he “has no feeling beyond the trifling” and in discussing the character of a negro male Kant wrote “this fellow was quite black from head to foot, a clear proof that what he said was stupid.” Eze, Race and the Enlightenment, pp. 55-57.

¹⁸³ Eze, Race and the Enlightenment, p.8.

Mills' conceptualization of white supremacy as a multidimensional system of domination is invaluable precisely because it exposes the conception of 'race' as "embedded in material structures, sociopolitical institutions, and everyday social practices."¹⁸⁴ White supremacy's shaping influence in the world in which we live is thereby undeniable. Indeed, for Mills the ability of philosophy to illuminate the human condition is dependent for its integrity and authenticity on taking account of the "whiteness of the world and how it affects its residents."¹⁸⁵ This philosophical affirmation of what *nonwhites* have never had difficulty *seeing* and *knowing* is timely and further validates Mills' assertion that:

Current work on white supremacy in critical race theory and critical white studies can thus be seen as belated catching up with the insights of black lay thought, simultaneously disadvantaged and advantaged by lacking the formal training of the white academy, and proper intellectual credit needs to be given to the black pioneers of this conceptual framework.¹⁸⁶

Certainly, my own experiences have consistently revealed that the "dominant constructions of identities and subjectivities" whether individual or collective marginalise nonwhite peoples, particularly women.¹⁸⁷ Jordan and Weedon emphasise the universality of

¹⁸⁴ Mills in Doane & Bonilla-Silva, White Out, p.48.

¹⁸⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ Mills in Doane & Bonilla-Silva, White Out, p.41.

¹⁸⁷ For them "identity and subjectivity" are social constructions but whereas the former implies "a conscious sense of self," the latter "encompasses unconscious and subconscious dimensions of the self, and implies contradictions, process and change." They also note the centrality of culture to the existence of unequal social relationships since the relative dominance of one group over another is "partly secured and

nonwhite women's experiences of invisibility, noting that in Britain "the realities of Black women's experience remain largely invisible."¹⁸⁸ In Ratcliffe's terms such *dominant constructions* is a most effective way for the culturally dominant to secure their "superordinate positions" by silencing and rendering invisible the voices and experiences of "subordinate groups."¹⁸⁹

My own experience of marginalization and that sense of invisibility as a minority ethnic woman was the focus of an article I co-wrote in 1997 for a publication to mark the 20th anniversary of the Uniting Church in Australia.¹⁹⁰ The article was the culmination of experiences of racial-ethnic exclusion, inferiorisation and subordination throughout my life-stages of adolescent, teenager, young-adult and womanhood. I felt compelled to articulate the triple marginalization a nonwhite woman like me experiences in a western context with pervasive racist and patriarchal tendencies; in white feminist discourses that purport to define my reality in terms of how white women see it rather than how I experience it; and within a diasporic minority ethnic patriarchal system where men have power and authority, especially in the public

reproduced through the practices and products of cultural institutions." Jordan & Weedon, Cultural Politics, pp.15-16.

¹⁸⁸ Jordan & Weedon, Cultural Politics, p.232.

¹⁸⁹ Ratcliffe reiterates the power of the dominant culture to ascribe inferiority in their construction of minority group identities attaching "significance to certain forms of supposed difference which do not necessarily accord with subjective notions of common interest or ethnic identity." Ratcliffe, 'Race', Ethnicity and Difference, p.10.

¹⁹⁰ Tahaafe et al, "Sing about Life, Sing about Possibilities: Women and the Uniting Church", in W. Emilsen, & S. Emilsen, (eds.), Marking Twenty Years: The Uniting Church in Australia 1977-1997, (Sydney: UTC Publications, 1997), p.224.

realm, that are denied to women.¹⁹¹ Jordan and Weedon confirm that “for a long time the politics of white feminists excluded the interests of black and third world women [and] white women’s practice still has a long way to go.”¹⁹² Often the expressed feminist perspectives are offered on behalf of all women when in fact such perspectives were a far cry from the realities of nonwhite women like me in which both racism and sexism figure prominently. As Lydia Johnson argued, a holistic approach to women’s oppression is needed to address “white feminists’ often exclusive focus on sexism.”¹⁹³

This strengthened my resolve to seek concrete ways to render visible minority ethnic people like myself — to assert our full-bodied, living, breathing and spirit-infused existence in direct resistance to the pervasive racist notion that nonwhites are “no more than their bodies.”¹⁹⁴ My impulse is to resist what I perceive to be an unhealthy devaluing of the *body* as well as an unrealistic valorization of the *spirit* in racial discourse that has been complicit in my being rendered invisible. Dyer highlights these “intangibilities of character, energy and

¹⁹¹Tahaafe et al in Emilsen & Emilsen, Marking Twenty Years, p.234. Many minority ethnic diasporic communities in western contexts remain quite patriarchal. For more on this debate and in particular Black and Asian feminists’ work that deeply influenced me (incl. Womanists in the US context) see the works of Brah, A., H. Carby, b. hooks, and A. Lorde, C. Mohanty, T. Morrison, and others listed in the bibliography.

¹⁹² Jordan & Weedon, Cultural Politics, p.215.

¹⁹³ L. Johnson, & J. Filemoni-Tofaeono, (eds), Weavings: Women Doing Theology in Oceania, (Suva: Institute of Pacific Studies, 2003), p.11.

¹⁹⁴ As Dyer noted, much of the biological approaches to race in the past had purposefully been tools of “imperial and domestic control” aimed at knowing and placing the nonwhites whilst at the same time showing *disinterest* in white racial character for that “would be to understand white people as, like non-whites, no more than their bodies.” Dyer, White, p.23.

high-mindedness...what we might call the spirit” as what has been assumed to distinguish “white people from all others.”¹⁹⁵

I make the assumption that experiences of marginalization should naturally lead to a predisposition to see and be empathetic with different forms of marginalized subjectivities including gender, class, sexual orientation, age and ability. In a very real sense my empathetic predisposition extends to all forms of marginalization and is not restricted to gender and ‘race’. Nevertheless, my priority has always been a commitment to combating racism. For me, then, “race remains the primary form of oppression” and is only further “compounded by class and gender” and other socially excluded subjectivities.¹⁹⁶ In short, I reiterate the study’s focus and emphasis on racial-ethnic difference as exclusion.

This is not to downplay my experiences of exclusion by white women and *nonwhite* men. I am under no illusion as to the persistence today of the “long history of negative images of black women.”¹⁹⁷ From experience I know that in minority ethnic communities women are often convenient scapegoats for male emasculation and social disadvantage and the community response to such dynamics only

¹⁹⁵ Dyer, White, p.23.

¹⁹⁶ Jordan & Weedon, Cultural Politics, p.207.

¹⁹⁷ Jordan & Weedon, Cultural Politics, p.209.

serve to detract attention from the wider social issues of racist structures and practices that really need addressing.¹⁹⁸

Nevertheless, as Susan Wolf would argue the gender issue is “not fully parallel with that of ‘race’ and ethnicity.”¹⁹⁹ Jordan and Weedon stress that racism and sexism are “far from analogous” and that most women can still “find some images and modes of femininity with which to identify” in white feminist discourse.²⁰⁰ They assert that in regards to racism there are no “positive forms of identity” on offer, as nonwhites are “defined in a negative relation of difference from being white.”²⁰¹ In other words, there is no such thing as “partial accommodation to racist definitions of black subjectivity.”²⁰²

¹⁹⁸ Jordan & Weedon highlight bell hooks’ strong resistance to the “widely accepted emasculation theories” that diminish Black women’s roles in the family and society and that continues to be used to “explain the social position and behaviour of Black men” when the real focus should be on challenging existing institutional and institutionalized racism. Jordan & Weedon, Cultural Politics, p.208.

¹⁹⁹ Wolf points out that the gendered identity of women is not in dispute since women have been recognized as women “for all too long” already. She highlights the problem for women as “the question of how to move beyond that specific, distorting type of recognition.” S. Wolf, “*Comment*” in A. Gutman, (ed) Multiculturalism, (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), p.76.

²⁰⁰ Jordan & Weedon, Cultural Politics, p.208. My experiences as a nonwhite woman is consistent with this assertion, and I would maintain that not “all the so-called feminine qualities that patriarchal societies ascribe to women” are necessarily negative. Being an emotional female is a common characterization I’ve experienced in western masculine encounters. Apparently it is inherently feminine and it makes me lose my capacity for objectivity. I continue to be unconvinced by the superior western patriarchal claim to objectivity. My Tongan cultural setting values emotionality and does not perceive it as inherently feminine but as inherently human. It makes no pretensions about human objectivity by honestly and openly accepting that to be human is to be subjective and that there is nothing inherently inferior about it. Tongan culture places more value and emphasis on developing the ability to know when subjectivity is in operation and when objectivity is called for in human cognitive processes and behaviour. But to cast objectivity as superior and to associate it with masculinity is highly objectionable to me.

²⁰¹ Jordan & Weedon, Cultural Politics, p.209

²⁰² *ibid.*

From Racism to Multiculturalism

My experiences so far have led me to conclude that the truly racial-ethnically inclusive community continues to be an ideal and an aspiration. Geared with deeper insights on the issue of 'race' I was nevertheless uncertain as to where and how exactly I should focus my anti-racist activism and strategies. A new century has begun and still there seems to be no end to 'race' and racism on the horizon. Ratcliffe suggests that conceptions of 'race' alternate between "colour, nationality, culture and/or religion."²⁰³ As exclusion, 'race' continues to be legitimized and reified in common popular discourse and in socio-political forums and debates.²⁰⁴ Further, Ratcliffe insists that even when there seem to be silence on the issue, euphemisms like *ethnicity* and *minority* are well utilized and the widespread misconception and misuse of the principle of political correctness only compounds the "assumed immutability" of 'race'.²⁰⁵

Given Mills' analysis of white supremacy with its exposure of whiteness' universal-neutral pretensions as well as the increasing interest in whiteness studies, there appears to be a growing consensus

²⁰³ He takes account of the impact of the politics of immigration and refugee and asylum seekers in how 'race' is understood in western contexts though clearly for the "average person in the street" visible difference in terms of "skin colour" plays a key role. Ratcliffe, 'Race', Ethnicity and Difference, p.23.

²⁰⁴ *ibid.* For example in the UK it is "legitimated by national legislation."

²⁰⁵ In addition to the *them* and *us* dichotomy, Ratcliffe reiterates the point that what exactly is immutable about 'race' beyond skin colour and other physical attributes continues to be unclear. Ratcliffe, 'Race', Ethnicity and Difference, pp.24-25.

amongst social and critical race theorists that the dissolution of the system of white supremacy is the key to solving the problem of 'race'.²⁰⁶ Approaches to dismantling white supremacy emphasise *white racial cognizance* in the hope that awareness and understanding of white power and privileges would motivate white people themselves to become change-agents, beginning with individual agency-oriented transformation. As Battalora insists fundamentally for ethical reasons white people need to be consciously racialised.²⁰⁷ Kendall is convinced that the only way to move white people to intentionally become change agents is to make them racially cognizant.²⁰⁸ Aileen Moreton-Robinson's notion of "inter-cultural intersubjectivity" puts emphasis on cross-cultural social interaction as the way forward.²⁰⁹ Anne Phillips gives credence to this approach in her analysis of human worth and recognition in relation to economic inequalities where she asserts:

Increased contact with others remains one of the main solvents of stereotypical misrepresentations. Failing that contact, our ideas of basic human equality can wear dangerously thin.²¹⁰

Seshadri-Crooks' psycho-analytical approach urges a radical transformation in how "difference is perceived" insisting that we live in such a thoroughly visual culture that we have committed ourselves to

²⁰⁶ Further discussion of such theorists and their approaches are included in the following paragraphs.

²⁰⁷ Battalora in Ruether, *Gender, Ethnicity & Religion*, p. 6.

²⁰⁸ She advocates white racialisation to help white people *see* the racial reality and hopefully move them "to do intentional personal work" which is necessary for "creating a just world in which everyone has an equitable opportunity to contribute and thrive." Kendall, *Understanding White Privilege*, p. 2.

²⁰⁹ Moreton-Robinson promotes inter-cultural intersubjectivity as a way of "disrupting subject positions" for otherwise any white anti-racist activity is an "intellectual engagement" that does nothing to compel white people to change their own white privileged subject positions. A. Moreton-Robinson, "Duggaibah, or Place of Whiteness: Australian Feminists and Race", in Docker & Fischer, *Race, Colour & Identity*, p. 245.

²¹⁰ A. Phillips, *Which Equalities Matter?*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2004), p.82.

an “irrational investment in appearance and physical attributes that is beyond simple historical or material explanations.”²¹¹ She advocates “redefining identity [and] reorganizing difference based on other kinds of reasoning than race.”²¹²

Ratcliffe’s emphasis on a “radical shift in the material relations between superordinate and subordinate groups” is particularly appealing in refocusing back on power dynamics and relations.²¹³ This is consistent with Mills’ insistence on placing racial domination and subordination in their rightful place — in the centre of political discourse and debate.²¹⁴ Indeed, Ratcliffe’s concern to transform the relationship between *superordinate* and *subordinate* groups is at the heart of current multicultural debates and identity politics. Indeed, the ‘race’ problem is brought into focus by contemporary discourses and debates on identity and multiculturalism.

Unprecedented global migration and the formation and growth of diasporic communities are just some of the dramatic features of a twenty first century characterized by daunting complexities and

²¹¹ Seshadri-Crooks, *Desiring Whiteness*, p.160.

²¹² *ibid.* A nice idea but who is to stop human beings from developing and deriving another form of hierarchy just as oppressive out of the new reasoning – whatever that may be. As Ratcliffe points out “there are no neutral ways of expressing differences between people of differing heritages” so the likelihood of another term being used to “perform the same function” is high. Ratcliffe, *‘Race’, Ethnicity and Difference*, pp.24-25.

²¹³ Seshadri-Crooks, *Desiring Whiteness*, p.25.

²¹⁴ Mills in Doane & Bonilla-Silva, *White Out*, p.40.

unimaginable changes.²¹⁵ Not surprisingly, out of this have emerged growing interests in new understandings of the human condition, identity formation and recognition.

Ramachandra defines human identity as “a product of dialectical interplay between the universal and the particular, between what [all] share and what is culturally specific.”²¹⁶ He highlights three levels of human identity as: what we share as members of the human family; what we share as members of a community, and the individual self-identity we “create for ourselves as self-conscious persons.”²¹⁷

In discussing the concept of identity, Charles Taylor rejects a modern understanding based on individual autonomy and public recognition as the “monological bent of modern philosophy.”²¹⁸ He favours a more communal approach where identity is formed (or *malformed*) through dialogue with others, and where that identity is recognized or misrecognised through “exchange” with others.²¹⁹ So for Taylor, identity formation is dialogical in nature and has given rise to a

²¹⁵ Docker and Fischer also include the “unfettered capitalist one world economy based [on] the free circulation of capital, commodities, services, people, signs, information and ideas” and the so-called “digital revolution in its perplexing multitude of applications from bio-genetics to global communication via the internet” as part of the dramatic changes characteristic of the new millennium. Docker & Fischer, *Race, Colour & Identity*, p.4.

²¹⁶ Ramachandra, *Subverting Global Myths*, p.135.

²¹⁷ He emphasizes the point that even what is “universally shared [are] culturally mediated” and so “acquire different meanings in different cultures.” Ramachandra, *Subverting Global Myths*, p.135.

²¹⁸ C. Taylor, “The Politics of Recognition”, in A. Gutman, (ed.), *Multiculturalism*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp.32-33.

²¹⁹ Taylor, pp.34-35.

“universally acknowledged” need for *recognition* as central to a “healthy democratic society.”²²⁰

Clearly, the issues of identity and recognition are not only thematic concerns of a multicultural reality. They also reflect the very multicultural nature of contemporary societies, for as Ramachandra notes “most countries today are culturally diverse.”²²¹ Taylor identifies a key development in such a multicultural reality as “the politics of difference” which is concerned with the recognition of the distinct and unique identity of the individual or group.²²² As Taylor puts it, this political assertion of difference maintains that it is “precisely that distinctness that has been ignored, glossed over, assimilated to a dominant or majority identity.”²²³

Phillips stresses the significance of the politics of difference in a multicultural society where “oppressive arrogant assimilationism” will only welcome *others* once they have abandoned their uniqueness.²²⁴ She acknowledges that equal recognition is undermined by “patterns of domination, denial and exclusion” which subject minority groups to

²²⁰ Taylor in Gutman, Multiculturalism, p. 36.

²²¹ Ramachandra details contemporary research where it is estimated that the “world’s 192 independent states contain about seven thousand living languages and over thirteen thousand ethno-linguistic groups” and he highlights the fact that migration and the “movement of people from one territory to another” has always been part of human history and “the norm” of being human. Ramachandra, Subverting Global Myths, p.130.

²²² Taylor in Gutman, Multiculturalism, p.38.

²²³ *ibid.*

²²⁴ She promotes the need for a “theorization of multicultural citizenship that accommodates differences between citizens rather than expecting minorities to abandon their practices and norms.” Phillips, Which Equalities Matter?, p.85.

the dominant group's "patterns of interpretation and communication."²²⁵ She writes:

When most countries are culturally, linguistically and ethnically diverse – when minorities and majorities increasingly clash over such issues as language rights, regional autonomy, political representation, education curriculum, land claims, immigration and naturalization policy, even national symbols — the idea that equal citizenship involves assimilating minorities into whatever happens to be the majority's norms seems patently unfair.²²⁶

Phillips would therefore maintain that the politics of difference is a legitimate strategy for "securing equal respect and recognition for minority cultural practices."²²⁷

Taylor asserts that "the politics of difference is full of denunciations of discrimination" and it lacks respect for the "principle of universal equality" since it allows and justifies reverse discrimination on the grounds of long term historical discrimination suffered by the disadvantaged.²²⁸ He articulates the concern over the push to "maintain and cherish distinctness" permanently instead of the temporary goal of creating a "level playing field", and highlights the concern over what is seen as excessive favouritism that gives special treatments and rights to certain groups not enjoyed by the rest of the population.²²⁹

²²⁵ Phillips, Which Equalities Matter?, p.86.

²²⁶ Phillips, Which Equalities Matter?, pp.127-8.

²²⁷ Phillips, Which Equalities Matter?, p.85.

²²⁸ Taylor, in Gutman, Multiculturalism, p.40.

²²⁹ *ibid.*

Phillips dismisses such concerns as “misguided”, maintaining that these measures are necessary as:

The objective is not to give members of minority groups some extra rights or freedoms not enjoyed by the majority, but simply to enable them to have the same as their peers.²³⁰

So for Phillips what may appear as favouritism is really equalisation. This point is made embarrassingly obvious by Ramachandra when he recounts the story of a young white American who violently opposed preferential treatment for “unqualified minorities”:

A person of *modest* intellect, he had gotten to Harvard largely on the basis of family connections. His first summer internship, with the White House, had been arranged by a family member. His second, with the World Bank, had been similarly arranged. Thanks to his nice internships and Harvard degree, he had been promised a coveted slot in a major company’s executive training program. In short, he was already well on his way to a distinguished career – a career made possible by preferential treatment.²³¹

This example makes the point that preferential treatment is quite prevalent in white affluent circles where being white and rich bestow unearned privileges that are taken for granted. It is debatable whether it is ‘race’ or *class* that primarily confers the privilege here but there is no denying that his *white* family connections certainly plays a key role. So much so that as the beneficiary of such preferential treatment he

²³⁰ Phillips, Which Equalities Matter?, p.36.

²³¹ Ramachandra, Subverting Global Myths, p. 150. quoted from Ellis Close’s *The Rage of a Privileged Class* (1993).

ironically does not see it, and is vehemently objecting to what he sees as preferential treatment for *unqualified minorities*.²³²

Phillips suggests that the big issue liberal democracies really need to address is social recognition (or the lack thereof) of marginalized groups. Whilst political equality presumes equal worth for all she is confident that the reality is far less equal and that a quick “scratch under the surface” will expose “deeply rooted assumptions about some people counting more than others.”²³³ While economic conditions play a role in recognising who is and is not worthy, Phillip shows that while some racial-ethnic minorities have closed the gap in economic parity with the white population, yet none are anywhere close to whites in political influence or representation, not to mention that they continue to be subjected to racial abuse.²³⁴

Basically, the politics of difference is exposing the inability of contemporary liberal democratic societies to cope with human diversity and difference. This is unfortunate, for given such plurality one wonders if better opportunities could ever arise for forming truly

²³² Ramachandra, *Subverting Global Myths*, p.79

²³³ She reiterates that “political equality is less advanced in established democracies” than previously thought as she points to the continuing “discrepancies between statement and reality – between saying all citizens have the same political rights regardless of sex or the colour of their skin” when in reality those who occupy public office and have political influence “are typically male and white.” Phillips, *Which Equalities Matter?*, p.126.

²³⁴ She uses examples of research in Britain where “on a range of economic indicators” African Asians and Chinese are no longer seen as “economically disadvantaged” but in political influence and recognition there continues to be a huge gap between them and the white majority. Phillips, *Which Equalities Matter?*, p.85.

inclusive communities and societies. Instead, competing multicultural identities have given rise to debates and disputes over what constitutes “the nature of the national community and its collective identity.”²³⁵

Certainly, many multicultural societies are characterized by an often overwhelming presence of contradictory demands competing for recognition “simultaneously in the same public arena.”²³⁶ Ratcliffe affirms that such multiplicity of competing demands is characteristic of the challenges 21st century multicultural societies must face.²³⁷ Moreover, Docker and Fischer highlight the problem settler-colonial societies like Canada, the US, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand face in trying to reconcile this “plethora of overlapping, competing and unresolved contradictions [with] a history and continuing legacy of oppression, dispossession, discrimination, forced assimilation [and] attempted genocide” of their indigenous peoples.²³⁸ They write:

The interests of indigenous people and of groups of immigrant minority settlers need to be acknowledged both in relation to each other as much as in relation to the majority group of settlers and their descendants.²³⁹

²³⁵ Ramachandra, *Subverting Global Myths*, p.130.

²³⁶ Docker and Fischer include “colonial versus postcolonial, old settlers versus new settlers, indigenous people versus invaders, majority versus innumerable minorities, white against black [and] collective inclusive national identity versus individual and personal or group identity” as competing interests vying for recognition in a multicultural society and context. Docker & Fischer, *Race, Colour & Identity*, p.6.

²³⁷ Ratcliffe, *‘Race’, Ethnicity and Difference*, p.ix.

²³⁸ Docker and Fischer are clearly of the opinion that “restitution to make amends [for] crimes of the past and the neglect of the present is nowhere near yet complete.” Docker & Fischer, *Race, Colour & Identity*, p.6.

²³⁹ *ibid.*

This is a very significant point for the future of multiculturalism as is demonstrated by the Australian experience. Helen Richmond makes the point that “Australia’s form of multiculturalism has tended to be shaped in terms of relating newer arrivals to the dominant Anglo-Celtic culture, leaving Indigenous Australians largely out of the picture [hence] their ambivalence about multiculturalism and what it means.”²⁴⁰

Imagining the Nation State as a Site of Inclusion

Phillips’ framing of the question of equal recognition in terms of equal citizenship emphasizes the prevailing concern that racial-ethnic minorities “enjoy equal citizenship as the majority group.”²⁴¹ Further, the emphasis on equal citizenship has intensified the nation state’s demand for a clear definition of the collective identity of the citizens within — that is, of who is *we*.²⁴² Put simply, who gets included in this collective identity or which identities get recognition?

²⁴⁰ H. Richmond, & M. Yang, (eds), Crossing Borders: Shaping Faith, Ministry and Identity in Multicultural Australia, (Sydney: UCA Assembly & BOM, 2006), p.11.

²⁴¹ She agrees that cultural domination does lead to “one-sided assimilation” and misrecognition, and further that secularism as “an egalitarian solution” to religious difference may not be as “even-handed as it claimed to be” as demonstrated by the French experience where a Muslim schoolgirl can no longer wear headscarves “in order to function as an equal citizen.” Phillips, Which Equalities Matter?, p. 84. Ramachandra makes the point that “secularization is not an inevitable process thrown up by abstract, impersonal forces” but is driven by “vested interests” too so secularist liberals “need to learn just how narrow and culture-bound their view of reason actually is.” Ramachandra, Subverting Global Myths, pp.154-56.

²⁴² Ramachandra, Subverting Global Myths, p.130.

The multiplicity of identities vying for recognition suggests that nation building and multiculturalism are not so compatible. Indeed, Ramachandra sees the “nation state as deeply homogenizing” because it expects its citizens to divest themselves of any other forms of identity in order to prove their allegiance to it.²⁴³ He writes:

In multiethnic societies whose constituent peoples have different histories and cannot therefore be treated in an identical manner, the modern state can easily become an instrument of oppression and even precipitate the very instability and secession it seeks to prevent.²⁴⁴

It would seem that the ongoing challenge for both the project of nation building and multicultural politics is to negotiate a balance between the “politics of universalism [and] the politics of difference.”²⁴⁵ As Docker and Fischer would put it, between the universalist egalitarian aspirations of the so-called “liberal democratic state” and the demand for “recognition of cultural specificity.”²⁴⁶

However, it is critical for our understanding that the argument for difference does not mean any kind of difference is acceptable. As Phillips has noted, any situation of cultural domination allows for misrecognition and one-sided assimilation so “assimilationism is

²⁴³ Ramachandra, Subverting Global Myths, p.138.

²⁴⁴ *ibid.*

²⁴⁵ Taylor emphasizes the “equal dignity of all citizens [and] the equalization of rights and entitlements” as the main concerns of a politics of universalism whilst a politics of difference promotes the equal recognition of different cultures. Taylor in Gutman, Multiculturalism, pp.37-38.

²⁴⁶ They see the “multicultural project” in terms of a “quest for identity and a struggle for recognition” at the same time. Docker & Fischer, Race, Colour & Identity, p.6.

profoundly inegalitarian".²⁴⁷ There is widespread misconception that sameness means equality, but promoting any kind of difference is also misleading for there are forms of difference that are not "compatible with equality."²⁴⁸ In short, not all forms of difference deserve equal recognition and respect. As Phillips has noted, not "all cultures are equally worthy when some are less just than others."²⁴⁹

This poses a real challenge for equal recognition and respect. Taylor advances a "presumption of equal worth" as an approach to all cultures.²⁵⁰ He argues that such a presumption of worth is appropriate on the basis that all cultures have "animated whole societies over some considerable stretch of time [and] have something important to say to all human beings."²⁵¹ Ramachandra and Phillips prefer to distinguish between the *group* and the *member* of the group so when recognition is an issue it may be possible to give equal respect to the member whilst simultaneously reserving the "responsibility to critique all cultures, including our own."²⁵²

²⁴⁷ Phillips, Which Equalities Matter?, p.84.

²⁴⁸ Phillips, Which Equalities Matter?, p.97.

²⁴⁹ She gives examples of situations where "differences become incompatible with equality" including cultural practices like *clitoridectomy*. *ibid*.

²⁵⁰ Taylor in Gutman, Multiculturalism, p.66.

²⁵¹ *ibid*.

²⁵² He further stresses that each culture is "a system of power and can never be politically neutral" since each "represents a particular way of looking at the world and structuring human relations and tends to legitimize and sustain a particular kind of social order." Ramachandra, Subverting Global Myths, pp.136-37. Phillips further highlights situations where "difference and inferiority" have had a "strong historical association" encouraging the "persistent segregation in occupations and roles" so that "black people excel in athletics and white people in managing the banks." Her point is that these situations are "unlikely to generate the profound sense of equal worth that underpins the principle of political equality. Phillips, Which Equalities Matter?, pp.38, 97.

Taylor reiterates what has become a matter of juggling the demands of equal respect and recognition that on the one hand “we treat people in a difference-blind fashion” and on the other, we are urged to “recognise and even foster particularity.”²⁵³ In Taylor’s words, we are asked to “violate the principle of nondiscrimination” on the one hand, and to “force people into a homogeneous mold that is untrue to them” on the other.²⁵⁴ What is most alarming for some is the claim that the universal and “supposedly neutral” was not so to begin with, and that what was thought to be a fair and difference-blind society in fact represents one hegemonic culture and therefore “itself highly discriminatory.”²⁵⁵

Ramachandra clearly dismisses as myth any claim that “the state can simply be based on democratic principles, without supporting a particular national identity or culture.”²⁵⁶ Likewise, Phillips’ assessment is that in all democracies today “to become a citizen is to trade one’s particular identity for an abstract, public self and this trade-in can be said to be peculiarly advantageous [to] the state-supported majority culture.”²⁵⁷ In terms of ‘race’ and white supremacy, it is not difficult to see how hegemonic white supremacist

²⁵³ Taylor in Gutman, Multiculturalism, p.43.

²⁵⁴ Taylor in Gutman, Multiculturalism, pp.37-38.

²⁵⁵ That is, “a particularism masquerading as the universal.” Taylor in Gutman, Multiculturalism, pp.43-44.

²⁵⁶ Ramachandra, Subverting Global Myths, p.139.

²⁵⁷ She would agree with Ramachandra about the centrality of the dominant culture to the project of nation building. Phillips, Which Equalities Matter?, p.23.

claims to universality and racial neutrality have necessitated the push for recognition of specific cultural interests.

Nevertheless, sensitive negotiation between universalism and particularity is necessary for as Taylor has noted “attempts to be recognized can fail.”²⁵⁸ Taylor acknowledges that contemporary discourses on ‘race’ and multiculturalism “are undergirded by the premise that withholding of recognition can be a form of oppression.”²⁵⁹ Indeed, as pointed out by Phillips the “marked shift from a discourse of racism to one of multiculturalism” is for many an “acknowledgement that racism has as much to do with the failure to recognize the legitimacy of difference as with starker statistics about employment or housing or poverty.”²⁶⁰ Ratcliffe would maintain that a clear condition for failure of recognition is the racial disparities between “superordinate and subordinate groups.”²⁶¹ Likewise, in Mills’ terms it is “racial inequalitarianism” that gives the superordinate group power to withhold recognition from the subordinate group.²⁶²

Undoubtedly, the question of recognition is critical for contemporary multicultural politics for as pointed out by Taylor it is “to do with the

²⁵⁸ In reference to pre-modern times, Taylor explains that whilst notions of identity and recognition existed then, they were built into the “social categories that everyone took for granted” and so they didn’t raise the same problems faced by a modern age. Taylor in Gutman, Multiculturalism, p.34.

²⁵⁹ Taylor notes that multicultural politics is “undergirded by the premise that withholding recognition” leads to unhealthy undemocratic societies and also “inflict damage on those who are denied it.” Taylor in Gutman, Multiculturalism, p.36.

²⁶⁰ Phillips, Which Equalities Matter?, p.89.

²⁶¹ Ratcliffe, ‘Race’, Ethnicity and Difference, p.25.

²⁶² Mills in Doane & Bonilla-Silva, White Out, p.48.

imposition of some cultures on others, and with the assumed superiority that powers this imposition."²⁶³ Taylor writes:

Western liberal societies are thought to be supremely guilty in this regard, partly because of their colonial past, and partly because of their marginalization of segments of their populations that stem from other cultures.²⁶⁴

Ultimately who is included in the nation-state's collective we signify recognition; who does not has failed to be recognized. In response to Taylor's analysis of the politics of recognition, Susan Wolf gives a remarkably simple and profound insight. She reiterates the politics of recognition in Taylor's terms as "the demand for equal respect for different cultures" and their members which requires that "the contributions of these cultures [and their members] be recognized as equally valid and valuable."²⁶⁵

The harm she highlights as the consequence of failure of recognition is "fundamentally to individuals and not to cultures."²⁶⁶ That is, her response simply focuses on the question of *who* comprises the collective *we*. For her, a failure of recognition in a so-called western liberal multicultural society is a failure to recognize that the collective

²⁶³ Taylor in Gutman, Multiculturalism, p.63.

²⁶⁴ *ibid.*

²⁶⁵ Wolf in Gutman, Multiculturalism, p.78.

²⁶⁶ Wolf in Gutman, Multiculturalism, p. 81.

“is not all white, and is not all descended from Europeans” and that these cultures together constitute *our* community.²⁶⁷

Wolf clearly affirms the impetus given by the politics of recognition for valuing “those cultures that occupy the world in addition to ourselves [and] to take a closer less selective look at who is sharing our cities.”²⁶⁸ Her concern is to identify who constitute a multicultural liberal and democratic society rather than debate the relative worth of individual cultures. Hence her insistence that if *we* are serious about understanding *ourselves* and *our* culture then “we had better recognize who *we*, as a community are!”²⁶⁹ Wolf’s position is mirrored by Ratcliffe’s assertion that “western constructs of otherness” rooted in its imperial and colonial past have so infected current understandings and relationships to the extent that “the very existence of negative images of the *other* has direct material effects on those excluded from society’s *we*.”²⁷⁰

²⁶⁷ Put another way, it is a dismal failure not to “see all the human civilization that was not European” and that some of these cultures comprise “the groups that together constitute *our* community.” Wolf in Gutman, Multiculturalism, p.80.

²⁶⁸ Wolf insists that in such a multicultural reality this is not only a “conscientious recognition of cultural diversity” but it is also what “justice demands” of us. Wolf in Gutman, Multiculturalism, p.85.

²⁶⁹ *ibid.*

²⁷⁰ Ratcliffe, ‘Race’, Ethnicity and Difference, p.160.

Imagining the Church as a Site of Inclusion

Evidently, my idea of an inclusive community — a place of uncontested belonging, racially just and inclusive — is quite ambitious. In Ratcliffe’s view such a community does not exist anywhere in the “contemporary world”, and so for many it is but a “utopian ideal”.²⁷¹ Though my primary concern is ‘race’ as exclusion, it is precisely that interest which commits me to Ratcliffe’s multicultural vision of a community that is “thoroughly mixed in terms of ethnicity, culture, religion and class.”²⁷² Fleshing out this multicultural vision, Ratcliffe prioritises respect and acceptance of “difference and diversity”; condemnation of “racism and racial discrimination accompanied by the political will to ensure their eradication”; achieving “overall material equality”; and creating the right environment and conditions for realizing this multicultural vision as truly “sustainable, socially mixed communities.”²⁷³

Naming the blockages to achieving this vision of multicultural inclusion as “structural, systemic, institutional and cultural” overlaid by an overwhelming “lack of political will”, Ratcliffe promotes strategies that take seriously individual agency within the framework of community

²⁷¹ Ratcliffe, *‘Race’, Ethnicity and Difference*, p.161.

²⁷² *ibid.*

²⁷³ Ratcliffe, *‘Race’, Ethnicity and Difference*, p.166.

mobilization and grassroots initiatives.²⁷⁴ This approach is in line with Modood's argument for multiculturalism. In his analysis of multicultural integration in Britain, Modood highlights the fact that British multiculturalism has largely been a "social, bottom-up movement [where] activists, spokespersons, and a plethora of community organizations" have been mobilized to challenge and modify public discourse and the political agenda.²⁷⁵ Like Ratcliffe, Modood places great currency in the capacity of grassroots community participation to shape public policies and the political climate. In reference to human rights and race relations legislations to promote equalities in Britain Ratcliffe writes:

Pressure from minority groups, the voluntary sector, local activists and writers/researchers provided the momentum for change.²⁷⁶

Likewise, Modood bemoans the lack of "mainstream political commitment and leadership" as a key obstacle to achieving a truly multiculturally inclusive community, and sees hope in grassroots political action making a real difference on this issue.²⁷⁷

Thus far my auto-ethnographic account has not addressed the issues of faith and spirituality as shaping influences of my journey and

²⁷⁴ Ratcliffe, *'Race', Ethnicity and Difference*, p. 162.

²⁷⁵ Modood, *Multicultural Politics*, p.207.

²⁷⁶ Nevertheless Ratcliffe is clear that for such grassroots and community efforts to make an impact they must be fully supported by both local and central governments and human rights agencies, in addition to "people from all communities and not just minorities". Ratcliffe, *'Race', Ethnicity and Difference*, p.163.

²⁷⁷ Modood, *Multicultural Politics*, p.208. Ratcliffe refers to a "lack of political will" and hence his emphasis on the "collective marshalling of positive agential forces" to make the vision of multiculturalism a reality. Ratcliffe, *'Race', Ethnicity and Difference*, p.166.

experiences as I sought to find belonging and inclusion in an alienating white dominant world. My narrative articulates a movement from the futility of searching for the inclusive community in the secular, to considering ecclesial forms of community as sites of social inclusion. Of particular interest are the Christian churches and faith communities not only as potential sites of inclusion but also as models of grassroots movements for social inclusion.

This raises questions about the nature and purpose of the church which makes ecclesiology and mission key themes for discussion. That is, the basic and fundamental query is what it means to be church in a postmodern pluralistic world. My interest in the church as inclusive community hints at an ecclesiology that adheres to a Pauline notion of the Church as Christ's Body - a community with richly diverse gifts united as one in Christ.²⁷⁸ In its local manifestation, the church is the embodiment of the "one holy catholic and apostolic church."²⁷⁹ Fundamentally, my spiritual journey, development, and growth as a Christian shaped and informed that understanding.

I was born into the Christian faith, brought up in it, and I continue to be active in it. In Tonga I had read the Christian Bible at a young age from cover to cover, and was a dedicated Sunday school student in my

²⁷⁸ Galatians 3:28, NRSV (This is the translation used throughout the study).

²⁷⁹ Nicene Creed, Council of Nicea (325 CE)

Kolonga village Methodist church. In Auckland New Zealand my family joined the Methodist Church of Aotearoa, but my faith journey and growth, and my formation as a maturing Christian really took shape in Australia. Upon arrival there, my family settled in Auburn – a multicultural, multi-religious, and working class suburb in western Sydney.

A priority was to find a church to call our spiritual home. As strong Methodists there was initial alarm when we could not find a local Methodist church. We discovered that in Australia the Methodist Church had joined two other denominations to form the Uniting Church in Australia.²⁸⁰ We joined the local Uniting church where my family became one of the founding families of the Auburn Tongan Uniting Church – currently the largest Tongan community in Sydney fully within the Uniting Church in Australia.²⁸¹

So although migration and resettlement had radically changed our family dynamics since we left Tonga, faith and spirituality continued to be integral to our home life. My mother was a key driver in ensuring we remained faithful and actively involved in the life and witness of the church.²⁸² Thanks to her the disruptions of the migration process

²⁸⁰ The Methodists, Presbyterians and Congregationalists formed the UCA in 1977

²⁸¹ There are many Tongan churches in Sydney especially, but many are semi-independent as allegiance to the Free Wesleyan Church in Tonga (FWCT) is still strong so there are ongoing question marks over their belonging in the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA).

²⁸² Cancer, which eventually took his life, had forced my father to take more of a backseat role.

did not interrupt my spiritual growth and faith formation. As a young adult I taught Sunday school, participated in and led Bible Studies, organised youth programs, preached and led worship regularly, cleaned the church and provided the flowers weekly as church steward. So my progression from Sunday school, to youth group, to lay preacher and worship leader, was almost seamless in a very Tongan Methodist fashion. In retrospect, I realised that with a strong faith foundation at home coupled with strong lay and ordained leadership in the church, I was not only growing and developing as a Christian but as a young leader as well.

Naturally, I became very involved in the denomination's youth movement, which led to active participation in the decision making councils of the Church in the state and national levels.²⁸³ From there I became involved in the world ecumenical movement which led to great opportunities of engaging and participating in the ministry and mission of the world church.²⁸⁴

But it was in the local Uniting Church in Auburn, Sydney that the seed was sown for my growing interest in ecclesial formations as models of social inclusion. It was there that I began to think consciously about what it means to be a multicultural and inclusive church. Without a

²⁸³ This was one of those many experiences where I happened to be the one nonwhite face, and often the youngest person, in a room full of middle-class white men of the cloth.

²⁸⁴ That is, my involvement with the World Council of Churches (WCC) and other global ecumenical bodies which will be discussed later in the study.

formal understanding of the socio-cultural significance of the kind of emerging cross-cultural ecclesial community I was part of, I knew that I was experiencing and witnessing something profound.²⁸⁵ I observed the Anglo and Tongan elders working closely together to foster a good relationship and friendship between the two cultural groups.²⁸⁶ Carol Morris and John Butson, who were ministers of the Auburn Parish at the time, made the following comments about the relationship between the two groups:

That has not happened overnight, nor has it happened without pain for people from both cultures. It has happened however, with good will, patience and understanding because time has been taken for relationships to develop.²⁸⁷

They continued to hold separate services on a Sunday, in English and Tongan respectively, but the willingness to work together to discern what it meant to be a community of Christ in that place was tangible. The usual blockages were present, like language barrier, different cultural understandings and traditions, varied material conditions and so on. But from the outset the Anglos, whose church property it was to begin with, welcomed the Tongans with open arms. There was mutual respect and openness to mutual learning. It helped that the

²⁸⁵ I use the term cross-cultural here as it was a situation where two different language and cultural groups were working out how to live and relate together as opposed to three or more different language and cultural groups trying to relate together in one church.

²⁸⁶ Anglo in the Australian context is used specifically to refer to people of Anglo-Saxon and Celtic background, but in many cases is used interchangeably with white.

²⁸⁷ C. Morris, & J. Butson, "Goodwill and Grief, Patience and Pain: Building Covenants in Auburn". In S. Yoo et al (eds.) Building Bridges: Sharing Life and Faith in a Multicultural Church, (Sydney: UCA National Mission & Evangelism Committee, 1993), p.30.

Anglo minister with pastoral oversight was a very able leader with a clear vision for the cross-cultural future of the community.

At a time when the Uniting Church in Australia was still in the early stages of its developing multicultural awareness, this particular local Uniting Church was quite advanced in its multicultural thinking and practice.²⁸⁸ The Anglo congregation was very typically elderly and its membership was rapidly declining. On the other hand, the Tongan congregation was demographically diverse, ranging from very young families to middle aged and grandparents with plenty of youth and young adults in-between. And it was continuing to grow.

The Anglos were very open to sharing power and even to moving aside to make space for Tongan leaders. For their part, the Tongans were confident to step up and participate but with clear recognition of the Anglos' hospitality, sense of fairness, and trust. As Morris and Butson confirmed:

The factors which contribute to this happy relationship are the strong leadership given by the leading Tongan families, the willing co-operation of all concerned, and a growing area of cross-cultural involvement in a gentle, yet firm way.²⁸⁹

With a strong sense of reciprocity the Tongan leaders' involvement in decision-making, administration, and pastoral matters was marked by

²⁸⁸ In 1985 the UCA declared itself to be a multicultural church and more on this will be discussed later in the study.

²⁸⁹ Morris & Butson in Yoo, Building Bridges, p.31.

respect, thoughtfulness, and loyalty to the Anglo elders and leaders. They remained distinct groups but with one decision-making council, and an active program of interactive and integrating activities.

My best memories as a young adult include Parish camps, with fun and games, the Anglo folks organizing the evening games before bedtime and Tongans leading the outdoor sports activities after lunch and during breaks from Bible Studies, workshops, worship, and prayer sessions. There were the quarterly bazaars to raise money for various mission projects and I have the enduring image of my mum's Tongan doughnuts and puddings amongst the Anzac biscuits and slices and cakes. There were regular combined worship services and social events where we mixed and mingled.

A very significant development that really benefited young people like me was our special relationship with the Anglo elders. Several of them took on mentoring roles for young Tongans like me and they cared and supported us in so many ways as if they were our own *grandparents*. We needed those kinds of mentoring especially in understanding the Uniting Church better and how it works. Our parents and families were supporting us too, but our Anglo *grandparents* were vitally important in helping us access Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) youth programs and resources that had defining influences in our young lives.

This was how I got involved in the denominational youth activities and programs. My Anglo mentors and church minister played key roles in ensuring that I was aware of the opportunities and in enabling me to use them. So when the opportunity, for example, was there for me and two other young Tongans to attend an international youth conference in 1994, our Anglo mentors made sure that we had the means to go by fundraising together with the Tongans. They gave generously out of their own pockets to ensure we went. And they followed our journeys in life with great interest. At my graduation, my wedding, and the birth of my daughter, my Anglo mentor/grandparents were there.

Most of the Anglo and Tongan elders of my parents' generation are gone now. Successive ministers came and went. But the cohesiveness in that cross-cultural faith community continued because the older generations of both Anglo and Tongans had built a strong foundation of friendship and love, developing and nurturing new Tongan lay leaders who carried on that tradition. As is stated in the Auburn Uniting Church Mission Statement:

Believing that each member of the church has gifts to offer to our common life, we are committed to the development of lay leadership in the church. Believing that the culture into which each of us was born is a gift of God and is to be cherished, we value the cultures that shape the lives of our people and remain open to the ongoing renewal of our cultural inheritances as they are challenged and enriched by the Gospel of Christ. We

recognize a particular responsibility to foster the Tongan language and culture and to allow the gifts of that culture to be woven into the fabric of the Australian society.²⁹⁰

Sadly, the Anglo group continued to decline and today there are just a handful of them left. The Tongans have taken on the role of custodians of the church properties and supporters of the remnant Anglos.

Before I became involved in the wider Uniting Church, I assumed that what was happening in my local church community in Auburn was replicated in other churches in the denomination. I thought that this was the normal way of being church in the UCA.

I also realised that a key reason for my active engagement in the life of my local church as a young person was the life-giving energy in the dynamic cross-cultural relationships I found there in contrast to what I experienced as homogenizing Anglo cultural influences in the wider Australian society. So that local church community became even more of a haven for me as a cross-cultural refuge from the dominant and homogenizing white Australian society *out there*. It was critically important for me to have a place to go to for my Tongan cultural *fix*, but just as important to be reminded of the hope and possibility of healthy cross-cultural relationships not infected by dominant white superiority and racism.

²⁹⁰ Auburn UCA Mission Statement, 2002 <<http://nat.uca.org.au/multi/news/stories/Auburnmission.htm>> (January 2011).

Without conscious planning what had emerged in that community was a particular model of a multicultural church comprising of two distinct language and cultural groups that “get along very well and organise themselves as one church, though they still prefer two separate services conducted in the two languages.”²⁹¹ This experience highlights the fact that there can be various models of multicultural ecclesial formation, and this particular model has come to be known as the *bi-cultural church* model.²⁹²

I did not realise then how unique that ecclesial formation was. It was still quite a novelty in the UCA then and it was working well for that specific local community. Unfortunately, if that was an experiment in growing multicultural and inclusive ecclesial social formations, one would have to judge the experiment a failure in the end. This formerly cross-cultural ecclesial community has become a Tongan mono-cultural Christian faith community, still valiantly trying to be culturally inclusive of the remnant Anglos, but for all intents and purposes a *mono-cultural church*.²⁹³

²⁹¹ K.Tahaafe-Williams, & S. Ackroyd, Multicultural Ministry Toolkit, (London:URC. 2005) p.23.

²⁹² Tahaafe-Williams & Ackroyd, Multicultural Ministry Toolkit, p.23.

²⁹³ There are different models of multicultural church and a mono-cultural church is primarily one where a specific ethnic or language group (white or nonwhite) constitute the faith community and this can be the case in its local or national manifestation. Tahaafe-Williams & Ackroyd, Multicultural Ministry Toolkit, p.8.

Years of multicultural ministry practice has convinced me that as difficult as the *multicultural church model* may be, for long-term, healthy, vibrant, Christian faith presence, witness, and service, that is the ultimate model to aim for. Perhaps more could have been done to focus energy in growing a more multiculturally mixed church by welcoming other cultures in the surrounding vicinity and forming one worship service even if it meant having bilingual or multilingual services – i.e. the *multicultural church model*.²⁹⁴ Perhaps more could have been done to encourage the growth of the Anglo congregation by establishing a focused ministry with young Anglo families to ebb the rapid flow of decline in that group.

My retrospective assessment, after years of multicultural ministry practice, is that the particular bi-cultural church model in my local church should have been treated as a stepping stone to being a truly multicultural church. Instead, the bi-cultural church model was assumed as the ultimate way to be church, and though there was equal respect and unity on one level, there was no real exchange of mission and ministry gifts and good practices that was mutually life-giving, so that one group continued to decline and practically died.

When I began to get involved in the wider Uniting Church and discovered that white supremacy and prejudice were just as common

²⁹⁴ Tahaafe-Williams & Ackroyd, Multicultural Ministry Toolkit, p.25.

in the Church and at all levels of its life as I was seeing in the secular, it was a moment of resignation to what had now become the *inevitable* in my imagination.²⁹⁵ Fortunately, my sense of resignation evolved into the resolve to hold the Church accountable for what I thought was a betrayal worse than my personal sense of betrayal.²⁹⁶ In my view it was a betrayal of its nature and purpose as Christ's Body.

If Paul was right about Christ's Church comprising of diverse peoples united as one in Christ, where "there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Gal.3:28) then I need to understand why this truly mixed ecclesial image is not normative in Christ's churches in 21st century multicultural contexts. In other words, why are the majority of Christian churches still predominantly mono-cultural? Why in most western multicultural contexts do we not have more churches that reflect that cultural diversity in its worshipping life, in its leadership, and in how it orders its life and mission? For even where a church membership is visibly multicultural, its styles of worship, the people in leadership, what music it uses, how its meetings are conducted, still largely reflect one dominant culture.

²⁹⁵ Thirty five years since union in 1977, and twenty seven years since it declared itself a multicultural church in 1985, the leadership of the UCA in Presbytery, Synod and Assembly levels is still overwhelmingly white.

²⁹⁶ As Michael Frost puts it so eloquently, "I'm tired of belonging to audiences and refuse to let the church off the hook regarding all the promises it makes to love one another, to care for the poor, to worship God!" M. Frost, Freedom to Explore: A Provocative A-Z for the Church, (Hawthorn, VIC: 36 Media Ltd, 2002), p.8.

The Pauline passage mentioned above is open to accusations of the *sameness as equal* critique and can be seen as the ecclesiological equivalent of the nation state's requirement for a collective identity that has turned out, as we have already seen, to be exclusive and problematic.²⁹⁷ My own interpretation of the statement that *there is no longer Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female* is that it is a statement of unity not of uniformity – i.e. of unity in diversity.²⁹⁸ It is a statement of the oneness of Christ's followers without wishing away their differences. In my view, Paul is not advocating the "abolition of distinct identities or human diversity."²⁹⁹ Rather, he wants to challenge the inequalities of worth we attach to human diversity, for such inequalities "cannot be sustained when we are confronted by the crucified and risen One."³⁰⁰

Implicit in that statement is the valuing of distinctness as God's gift of creation, but without diminishing a collective faith identity rooted in God in Christ. It is also a statement of equality that speaks to

²⁹⁷ Here I wish to also note the ongoing challenges of exclusive faith identities and religious tensions that inter faith relations and dialogues continue to wrestle with, but without dwelling on that issue as it is one that others have dealt with elsewhere and it is not the focus of this study.

²⁹⁸ Tahaafe-Williams & Ackroyd maintain that such a Biblical statement affirms the "faith that the Holy Spirit moves the church to bear witness to" the unity of Christ's followers in him whilst at the same time "respecting and accepting the uniqueness of ethnic and cultural difference." Tahaafe-Williams & Ackroyd, Multicultural Ministry Toolkit, p. 4.

²⁹⁹ K. Tahaafe-Williams & W. Hudson-Roberts, We Belong: Celebrating Cultural Diversity and Living Hospitality, (Oxford: Baptist Union & United Reformed Church, 2006), p.27.

³⁰⁰ Paul is clear that the cross of Christ "institutes a radical equality for all" so it is not difference the cross abolishes but inequalities. See also (2 Cor11:22) & (Phil 3:4-5). Tahaafe-Williams & Hudson-Roberts, We Belong, p.27.

Christian values that transcend socio-political and cultural hierarchical constructions which justify the subjugation of particular persons and groups as seen in the reference to slave and free.³⁰¹

The possibility of an inclusive multicultural ecclesial formation and the continuing elusiveness of such an inclusive community remain central to our enquiry. Moreover, it necessitates a particular focus on the nature, purpose and mission of the Church and the implications of that for a multicultural and inclusive community.

I imagine the Christian Church to be a place where lives and relationships are rooted in the gospel values of love, compassion, justice, and peace.³⁰²(Col.3:12-4:1) That leads me to expect more of the Church than any other social formation. That wherever it exists, the Church ought to model what it means to be Christ's just and inclusive community of faith.

So far my experiences have shown me that what I expect and what the Church ought to be is not necessarily what the Church is. To be sure, the ultimate scope of a multiculturally inclusive church would and should be wider than racial-ethnic difference. Indeed, it should

³⁰¹ As John made clear in his gospel, by living and witnessing to the Christian values of love, treating others with kindness and respect, Christ's followers shall then be known to all people as Christ's disciples. (John 13:35).

³⁰² Frost describes the church as a "family, a body, a living, breathing organism" with a key responsibility to expand "God's kingdom." Frost, Freedom to Explore, p. 6.

follow from the Pauline passage above that the status of a church that excludes anyone on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, age, class, or disability may be in question. But to reiterate, the focus of the study is racial-ethnic as exclusion and so our discussion of the notion of a multicultural and inclusive church must primarily be in those terms. I therefore signal my intention to explore deeper the nature and purpose of Christ's Church to determine the existence of a gospel imperative for multicultural inclusiveness in being church. This is the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter Two

IMAGINING THE INCLUSIVE CHURCH: AN ECCLESIAL VISION

My experiences as a nonwhite minority ethnic woman in postmodern pluralistic and secularized western contexts have led me to the conclusion that my quest for a truly racial-ethnically inclusive place of belonging may be idealistic and unrealistic. As faith and spirituality are integral to my very existence, it seems reasonable to turn to Christian theology, mission, and ecclesiology for more inclusive responses to the issues I had found so wanting in more secular settings.

Undoubtedly, my Tongan culture, western cultural influences, and Christianity are key factors in the shaping and forming of the human being that I have become. Taking my faith and spirituality seriously and the rights and responsibilities pertaining to a human person, my desire and commitment is to live them out in ways that honour my cultural heritage, but more importantly, that are true and faithful to the teachings and ministry of Jesus Christ my Lord and Redeemer.

Having been nurtured and formed in the Christian Church, I had grown up with certain assumptions of what a church is and what it is meant to do. Key to these assumptions is my conviction that in the church all peoples, including me, can find uncontested belonging regardless of gender, class, or racial-ethnic background. Implicit in such assumptions is an understanding of the church as a place of racial inclusiveness and welcome, which task is to model that welcome and inclusiveness to the world around it.

However, it quickly became evident that such an understanding of the church does not necessarily make it so. Therefore, queries about ecclesiology and mission, the characteristics of the early Christian Church, and Biblical and Theological understandings of what it means to be Christ's Church become paramount. I am interested in uncovering patterns and notions of mission and ecclesiology that might suggest a gospel imperative for the multicultural and inclusive church. That is, a gospel imperative for the ecclesiological version of Ratcliffe's multicultural vision of a community that is truly racial-ethnically mixed, and where there is sufficient will for its sustainability.³⁰³ Ultimately, I seek to better understand Christ's calling for his Church in the twenty first century, and the tools to make a constructive and appropriate contribution in response to that calling.

³⁰³ Ratcliffe, 'Race', Ethnicity and Difference, p.166.

A Word on Ecclesiology and Mission

Considering the purpose of the church the Swiss theologian Emil Brunner once wrote: "The church exists by mission, just as fire exists by burning."³⁰⁴ So, to talk about the purpose or mission of the church is to talk about its nature. David Bosch thinks that mission is ultimately "undefinable" and that we can only ever achieve some approximations as to what it is.³⁰⁵ Avery Dulles is convinced that the church is a "mystery" that cannot be reduced to a "single theological paradigm."³⁰⁶ Nevertheless, there are Biblical and ecclesial images particularly in the New Testament that give some clues as to the nature and purpose of the church.

Alister McGrath notes that the church as a physical historical reality actually existed for a while before any serious theoretical consideration was given to what it is and what it was called to be and to do.³⁰⁷ Understandably, at a time when the threat of persecution was never far away, the early Christians may not have had the luxury of time to

³⁰⁴ E. Brunner, The Word and the World, (Virginia: Christian Movement Press, 1931), p.108.

³⁰⁵ D. Bosch, Transforming Mission, (New York: Orbis Books, 2001), p.9.

³⁰⁶ A. Dulles, Models of the Church, Exp. edn (New Your: Doubleday, 2002), p.197.

³⁰⁷ A. McGrath, Christian Theology: An Introduction, 4th edn (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), p.391.

engage in theoretical discussions but instead got on with being church, living and witnessing to God's redemptive love in Christ.³⁰⁸

Nevertheless, already in the New Testament were a rich array of church imagery that are often grouped under four headings: i) the church as the People of God (1 Pet.2:9) stresses the notion of God's "new chosen people" sharing in the promises made to Israel; ii) a Servant People (Matt.20:25-26) depicts a community called by God to humble "costly service", to serve God in worship and prayer and the world in word and deed; iii) the Body of Christ is a Pauline image of the church as a community with richly diverse gifts united as one in Christ (Gal.3:28) and iv) a Community of the Spirit affirms the presence and activity of the Spirit in the church, bringing new life and signaling the coming of God's reign.³⁰⁹

These New Testament images of the church have influenced and shaped ecclesiological thinking over the centuries and continue to do so. Various theories of the church can be traced through Christian history right back to the Donatist Controversy in the 4th century, the European Reformation in the 16th century, and Vatican II last century.³¹⁰ Perhaps the most familiar contemporary theory of the

³⁰⁸ From the first-century martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 8:1) til the time of Constantine the early Christians experienced extreme persecution from both Jew and Gentile anti-Christian powers. So from the outset marginalization and exclusion were typical of the reality confronting the early church.

³⁰⁹ D. Migliore, Faith Seeking Understanding, 2nd edn (Michigan: Eerdmans, 2004), p.253-54.

³¹⁰ McGrath, Christian Theology, pp.391-418.

church is Avery Dulles' seminal effort to articulate what is truly a "complex reality."³¹¹ He details five models: institutional, mystical communion, sacrament, herald, and servant, which he concisely summarises thus:

By its very constitution, the Church is a communion of grace (mystical communion) structured as a human society (institutional). While sanctifying its own members, it offers praise and worship to God (sacrament). It is permanently charged with the responsibility of spreading the good news of the gospel (herald) and of healing and consolidating the human community (servant).³¹²

For Dulles these models together reflect "salient features of the Church of Christ as it exists at any time or place."³¹³ However, knowing that separately no one model could adequately account for the church, he sought to develop a systematic ecclesiology with the capacity to "harmonize the differences" amongst the various theories of the church including his five models.³¹⁴ He came up with a discipleship model which he thought fitted the bill as inclusive, flexible, and so capable of accommodating the tensions that inevitably exist among various ecclesial theories.

The discipleship model perceives the church as "instituted" by God in Christ, who inaugurated a community of disciples in his earthly mission. Jesus personally selected the first disciples whom he taught

³¹¹ Migliore, Faith Seeking, p.255.

³¹² Dulles, Models, p. 196.

³¹³ ibid.

³¹⁴ Dulles, Models, p.198.

and commissioned to continue his work. Through the gift of his Spirit the community of disciples was expanded to include all believers who continued Christ's ministry, proclaiming the word, worshipping, praying, and caring for those in need. So the discipleship model is not only founded in scripture as told by the gospel writers, it is also rooted in the sacrificial love and reconciling mission of God in Christ.³¹⁵

The discipleship model affirms the need for the church to foster belonging and mutual support amongst members, but without neglecting Christ's work to transform the world.³¹⁶ A key characteristic of the discipleship model is its emphasis on a visible, counter-cultural "contrast society", contrary to the norms of the world.³¹⁷ For the early disciples this was achieved by leading a deeply religious, faithful and exceptionally ethical moral life style – what is seen in contemporary Christianity as spiritual maturity.³¹⁸ Jesus was certainly strict with his rules for the first disciples, requiring that every disciple gave himself totally to following Christ's way.³¹⁹ Aware of his own imminent death Jesus began to emphasise discipleship as sharing in his redemptive suffering as well.

³¹⁵ Migliore, Faith Seeking, p.262.

³¹⁶ Migliore, Faith Seeking, p.258.

³¹⁷ Dulles, Models, p.215.

³¹⁸ S. Bachelard defines spiritual maturity as "a kind of authenticity and simplicity...holiness or purity of heart." S. Bachelard, "Spiritual Maturity and Ministerial Obligation" in Tom Frame (ed.) Called to Minister, (Canberra: Barton Books, 2009), p.127.

³¹⁹ Dulles, Models, p.200.

Subsequent to his crucifixion and resurrection, the notion of discipleship shifted, with Christ's presence in the Spirit both widening the community of disciples as well as allowing for various forms and degrees of discipleship. Though he had ascended, Christ continues to shape the community of disciples through word and sacrament. In the liturgy and worship the community of disciples becomes more fully the church, called to serve God's mission in the world. William Stringfellow maintains that "the liturgy is an affirmation and celebration of the active witness and involvement of Christ's followers in the daily realities of the world. It is the point at which the connection between Christian faith life and Christian ethical commitment to the world is made explicit."³²⁰

The sacraments, particularly the Eucharist, are magnified as signs of "the continuing presence of the grace of God in Jesus Christ."³²¹ In the Eucharist disciples find both community nourishment and impetus for social action. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer puts it, the Eucharist is the point at which "the life together of Christians under the Word has reached its fulfillment."³²² In Stringfellow's terms, the Eucharist is not just some religious ritual, but is "a political action."³²³ To receive the Lord's Supper as Christian disciples who are fully reconciled to each other and to God, which for Dietrich Bonhoeffer is an absolute

³²⁰ W. Stringfellow, A Keeper of the Word, (Michigan: Eerdmans, 1994), pp.102,106.

³²¹ Migliore, Faith Seeking, p.258.

³²² D. Bonhoeffer, Life Together: Prayerbook of the Bible, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), p.118.

³²³ Stringfellow, A Keeper, p.104.

Eucharistic prerequisite, is a radically political and counter-cultural act.³²⁴ Bonhoeffer sees the discipleship model as the community (*koinonia*) of Christ “giving a Christian form to daily life...in diaspora in the midst of the world.”³²⁵ As such, his ecclesiology gives centrality to the eschatological character of Christ’s church as a “sign of hope”.³²⁶ Needless to say, to be a sign of hope and reconciliation in the midst of a world captive to war, violence, and greed is nothing if not political action.

Clearly, this notion of the church as a community of disciples values the precious and costly nature of discipleship. To be a disciple is to walk in the way of Christ. The way of Christ according to Dulles means “denying oneself, taking up one’s cross, losing one’s life, being last and least, drinking the cup that Jesus drank, and being baptized with Jesus’ baptism” for as a church the community of disciples is to be a beacon to the world, like a “city upon a mountaintop” reflecting the “transcendent value of the kingdom of God.”³²⁷

Certainly, discipleship is a radical path with an open invitation to the entire body of culturally diverse believers. It may well be too radical and too demanding for many 21st century Christians. Clearly, both Bonhoeffer and Dulles see Christian discipleship as a whole life

³²⁴ Bonhoeffer, Life Together, p.117.

³²⁵ Bonhoeffer, Life Together, p.126.

³²⁶ *ibid.*

³²⁷ Dulles, Models, p.201.

commitment, which may be asking too much in contemporary secularized western contexts. Perhaps the widespread decline in mainline western churches is a reflection of a diminished understanding of Christian discipleship. Indeed, discipleship in the 21st century could be characterized in Marva J. Dawn's words as:

A movement away from the classic understanding of worship as a community's praise of God to a new individualized expression; rejection of doctrines as a means for finding our way in favour of emancipation from connections with institutions; the boomers' search for a church to meet their needs instead of commitment to the Church through which to serve.³²⁸

It would seem that contemporary notions of discipleship privilege individualism and personal needs underlined by the "pursuit of relevance" at the expense of tradition.³²⁹ This is quite contrary to Dulles' and Bonhoeffer's understanding of true discipleship which emphasize community and serving others and which is formed through regular gatherings for "accurate theological, exegetical, and doctrinal work [done] together with spiritual exercises" of prayer and biblical engagement and reflection.³³⁰

No ecclesiology is complete without the creedal attributes of the Christian church. Better known as the classical *marks* or *notes* of the church, in the Nicene Creed it states that the church is "one, holy,

³²⁸ M. J. Dawn, Reaching Out without Dumbing Down: A Theology of Worship for this Urgent Time, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1995), p.144.

³²⁹ *ibid.*

³³⁰ Bonhoeffer, Life Together, p.122.

catholic and apostolic.”³³¹ The WCC Faith and Order Commission’s paper on the *Nature and Mission of the Church* puts it this way: “Being a creature of God’s own Word and Spirit, the Church is one, holy, catholic and apostolic. These essential attributes flow from and illustrate the Church’s dependence upon God.”³³²

Widely accepted as the defining “characteristics of the true church”, the attributes necessitate a restating of the distinction between the “theological church” and the “sociological church”.³³³ The former is understood as “the mystery of Christ realised in the community of those who believe in him and are assembled in his name” and through which “Christ continues his saving presence” by the power of the Holy Spirit.³³⁴ The latter is “a fact of observation”, an institutional reality that anyone can access whether they have faith or not.³³⁵

To say that the church is *one* is a statement of the unity of the church in the one creator redeemer God “who binds the church to himself by Word and Spirit and makes it a foretaste and instrument for the redemption of all creation.”³³⁶(Eph.4:1-6) It is an “expression of the unity of the triune God” and the church’s “participation in the

³³¹ Nicene Creed, 325 CE.

³³² World Council of Churches Faith & Order Commission, The Nature and Mission of the Church, Paper 198 (Geneva: WCC, 2005), A.12.

³³³ Migliore, Faith Seeking, p. 270.

³³⁴ *ibid.*

³³⁵ Dulles, Models, p.115.

³³⁶ WCC Faith & Order, Paper 198, A.12.

communion of the Father and Son in the Spirit."³³⁷(Jn17: 11, 21) This notion of church unity then is not grounded on any "ecclesiastical organizational system" but in a common faith in the love of God and commitment to the good news of Christ.³³⁸ As McGrath would assert, the unity of the church presupposes "multiple and diverse" ecclesial formations where "specific languages, histories, customs, and traditions need not be denied" but affirmed.³³⁹ In that light, not even rampant denominationalism, arrogant cultural supremacy, and entrenched cultural separatism can compromise the unity of the church. For as Migliore so profoundly puts it, church unity is not a mandate for uniformity and sameness, but rather a "lavish celebration of the communion of the different" rooted in the love of God!³⁴⁰

The *holiness* of the church is primarily attributable to the One who called the church and its members. That is, the church is holy because God who calls it into being is holy.³⁴¹ The church is also holy because it is a community set apart from the norms of the world to bear witness to the saving love of God in Christ. It is not to be confused with any notions of individual moral superiority. Indeed, the church reflects its holy character most meaningfully when it stands

³³⁷ WCC Faith & Order, Paper 198, A.12.

³³⁸ McGrath, Christian Theology, p .412.

³³⁹ McGrath, Christian Theology, p. 411.

³⁴⁰ Migliore, Faith Seeking, p. 270.

³⁴¹ WCC Faith & Order, Paper 198 para. 12.

courageously for God's justice, working to transform systematic social injustices, and caring for the poor and marginalized.³⁴²

For Protestant reformers in the sixteenth century, *catholicity* was a matter of doctrine, a position consistent with the fifth century writer, Vincent Lérins' definition: "that which is believed everywhere, at all times, and by all people."³⁴³ In contemporary ecumenical discourse the New Testament conception of catholicity as "totality" has re-emerged stressing the view that local ecclesial forms represent and embody the one "universal" church.³⁴⁴ The church catholic is the community "in which, in all ages, the Holy Spirit makes the believers participants in Christ's life and salvation, regardless of their sex, race or social position."³⁴⁵ Of course, the church catholic is not to be confused with Roman Catholic, or with orthodoxy for that matter. Even less so is it to be confused with a type of Swiss political neutrality. As Migliore points out, often it is necessary for the church "to be paradoxically partisan" in order to "affirm the catholicity of the church and the universality of the lordship of Christ."³⁴⁶

The church is *apostolic* as a community "planted in the world by the apostles; adheres to the teachings of the apostles and is carrying on

³⁴² Migliore, *Faith Seeking*, p. 271

³⁴³ Quoted in McGrath, *Christian Theology*, p. 415.

³⁴⁴ *ibid.*

³⁴⁵ WCC Faithh & Order, para.12.

³⁴⁶ Migliore, *Faith Seeking*, p. 272.

the succession of apostolic ministry."³⁴⁷ This emphasis on historical succession is also affirmed by the WCC Faith and Order statement that the church apostolic is "a faithful community that lives in, and is responsible for, the succession of the apostolic truth expressed in faith and life throughout the ages."³⁴⁸ Most of all, the apostolic character of the church is best seen in its faithfulness to the gospel and in how it carries out Christ's inclusive ministry in the world.³⁴⁹

Note the emphasis here is on faithfulness to the gospel and Christ's ministry in the world which is to say, in Bonhoeffer's words, that apostolicity is not about "cloistered isolation but the most intense concentration for ministry outside" the church.³⁵⁰ In short, the church is apostolic when it is being Christ's *sent* community.

We see in the New Testament ecclesial images an emphasis on sacramental life and service as the purpose and mission of the church. Dulles' notion of discipleship stresses walking in the costly way of Christ as the ultimate mission of the church. The Nicene marks highlight the utter dependency of the church on God for its very being. Together they affirm the conviction that "there is church because there is mission."³⁵¹ In the words of Bosch mission is "primarily and

³⁴⁷ McGrath, Christian Theology, p. 416.

³⁴⁸ WCC Faith & Order, para.12.

³⁴⁹ Migliore, Faith Seeking, p. 272.

³⁵⁰ Bonhoeffer, Life Together, p.120.

³⁵¹ Bosch, Transforming Mission, p. 390.

ultimately an activity of God (*missio Dei*) for the sake of the world; a ministry in which the church is privileged to participate."³⁵²

To say that mission is God's activity that the church participates in is to agree with Bonhoeffer that the church is "a reality that has already been established by God's action in word and grace."³⁵³ In short, mission is God's activity for the sake of the world, and the church - God's "gift of visible community" - exists to serve that mission.³⁵⁴

These ecclesial images and models inform, illuminate, and critique each other to bring believers closer to an understanding of the nature and purpose of the church. What they together manifest and highlight is a church that exists to serve God's mission in the world in the "power of the Holy Spirit in response to the gospel of the ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ."³⁵⁵ A renewed ecclesial community characterized by the "absence of barriers separating people from God and each other", meaningful sharing of power and responsibilities, and priority given to the weak, poor, and marginalised.³⁵⁶ It is a distinct community, fully aware of its status as a "sign for the coming of God's kingdom."³⁵⁷

³⁵² Bosch, Transforming Mission, p. 392.

³⁵³ Bonhoeffer, Life Together, p.126.

³⁵⁴ Bonhoeffer, Life Together, p.127.

³⁵⁵ Migliore, Faith Seeking, p. 251.

³⁵⁶ Migliore, Faith Seeking, p. 252.

³⁵⁷ *ibid.*

The fundamental vision of a multicultural and inclusive church presupposed throughout this study is that of an *ecclesia* which “existence and proclamation bear witness to the coming reign of God.”³⁵⁸ It does this through recognizing the uniqueness of cultures whilst emphasizing unity and oneness in Christ Jesus; actively encouraging mutual acceptance, respect and the just sharing of power; ordering its life and witness according to the gospel values of justice, dignity, and the harmonious sharing of life with peoples from different cultures and backgrounds; and serving all peoples, including people of no faith and of other faiths with the love of Christ.³⁵⁹

Undoubtedly, the multicultural vision is echoed throughout this rich array of ecclesial imagery and models, and in the creedal marks. Committing to Christ’s way of privileging the poor and marginalised, and serving God and the world humbly and with justice is integral to the multicultural vision. Jung Yung Lee’s framing of the multicultural vision in terms of an *ecclesia* of the marginalised further affirms the centrality of God’s mission in the world to the multicultural church.³⁶⁰ All these signal the gospel mandate for an inclusive *ecclesia* for all peoples – i.e. a multicultural church.

³⁵⁸ Migliore uses church as *ecclesia* in reference to “assembly or congregation” and consistent with his approach, the study uses *church* to “designate either local assemblies of Christians or the universal Christian community.” Migliore, *Faith Seeking*, p.251.

³⁵⁹ K. Tahaafe-Williams, “Multicultural Ministry: A Call to Act Justly”, *International Review of Mission* 100.1(392) (April 2011): 17-25.

³⁶⁰For Lee true discipleship means prioritizing the poor and the marginalized which is the way of Christ. Lee, *Marginality*, p.119.

An image of Christ's Church that has emerged out of these models and marks is one that is truly multicultural in its very nature and purpose. This means a just and inclusive community of faithful disciples who live and exist to serve God's mission in Christ in a world characterised by God's wondrous miraculous and challenge-filled diversity.

To reiterate, justice and inclusiveness go hand-in-hand in a truly multicultural church. When a church with diverse membership does not reflect that diversity in how it orders its life and witness; so that its governance, its leadership, its mission priorities, its worship life, are in the hands of one racial-ethnic group, that church is not being inclusive and it is not truly multicultural. In effect, the voices of the other groups in the church community are being excluded and the whole life of that church does not reflect mutual sharing and equal participation, so a vibrant faith rich in diverse spiritualities and gifts is not evident. In short, there is no evidence of equal respect and recognition in that church and that is a justice issue. To be a multiculturally inclusive *ecclesia* is more than just having different coloured faces in the pews.

So the image of Christ's church that has emerged out of the New Testament ecclesial models and marks give shape to a body of believers whose existence was borne out of human diversity and

whose perpetual calling is to live, witness, and serve God's world both as example and agent of God's inclusive love. It is an inspiring image of a community of disciples of various backgrounds, faithfully serving the world with humility and compassion, utterly devoted to Christ's ministry of love and justice rooted in the Spirit's calling to be one, holy, catholic and apostolic.

The gospel imperative for the multicultural *ecclesia* is perhaps most compellingly demonstrated in the Pauline imagery of the *Body of Christ* and the two creedal marks of *oneness* and *catholicity* as they specifically highlight the theme of unity in diversity which is central to the multicultural vision. Migliore's emphasis on the "common dependence of all members of the body" on Christ alone who is the head (Col.1:15-20; Eph. 5:23), and on the "mutual dependence of all members" of the body on each other, conjure up a multicultural ecclesial vision of vibrant life and cohesiveness.³⁶¹ It paints a multicultural ecclesial vision where diverse believers, united in Christ (Gal.3:28; 1 Cor 12: 13-27), bring their "variety of gifts for the enrichment and edification" of the whole *ecclesia* and for the purpose of serving God's mission in the world.³⁶² He places the unity of the body in God's power to bring into being a "community made up of people of many nations, cultures, and ethnic groups and empowers

³⁶¹ Migliore, *Faith Seeking*, p.254.

³⁶² Migliore, *Faith Seeking*, p. 254.

them with many gifts of mutual service in the church and in the world."³⁶³

Jeffrey Vanderwilt in his account of developments in ecclesiology in recent times sees the "ministry of unity in the church" as social inclusion, mutual respect, sharing of ideas, and the holding together of diverse voices which is distinct from imposing a stifling uniformity.³⁶⁴ As Migliore asserts, it is not a "stifling, suffocating unity [but] a differentiated and rich unity that is confessed by faith, shared in love, and awaited for in hope."³⁶⁵

Migliore further elaborates his understanding of *catholicity*, dispelling the common misconception that it is to do with some kind of "abstract universality" disconnected from the "particularities of culture and history" and that it stands for nothing in particular as it strives to please all and offend none.³⁶⁶

In a similar vein, Vanderwilt refuses to ignore the particularities of culture and history and expects the church as the *body of Christ* to take seriously its responsibility to critically examine the "qualitative dimensions" of its life ensuring that it is ordered in a just manner and

³⁶³ Migliore, *Faith Seeking*, p. 270.

³⁶⁴ J. Vanderwilt, *A Church Without Borders*, (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 1998), p.45.

³⁶⁵ Migliore, *Faith Seeking*, p. 271.

³⁶⁶ Migliore, *Faith Seeking*, p. 272.

to avoid thwarting itself "in order to serve less than ultimate goals."³⁶⁷

Bluntly he asserts:

We cannot say...that we are a *body of Christ* and then gather at a table where a significant plurality of the baptized is uninvited by custom or by law.³⁶⁸

Recognising how easy it is to hide behind so-called customs and laws, Migliore insists that *catholicity* must be understood by the contemporary church as "inclusive of all kinds of people."³⁶⁹ Such an understanding requires the church to respond to the call to be "paradoxically partisan" in the way the apostle Paul did when the Gentiles were "being excluded from hearing the good news of freedom in Christ."³⁷⁰

Most importantly, he asserts that –

if particular racial groups and certain economic classes are being turned away from the church, either directly or indirectly, because they do not find their concerns and needs taken seriously, then it is necessary to become partisan for these people, as black theology, feminist theology, and other forms of liberation theology do...³⁷¹

This is precisely so to be faithful and true to the "catholicity of the church and the universality of the lordship of Christ."³⁷² Significantly, from a multicultural perspective, this is obviously an argument for

³⁶⁷ Vanderwilt, *A Church*, p.65.

³⁶⁸ Vanderwilt, *A Church*, p.64.

³⁶⁹ Migliore, *Faith Seeking*, p.272.

³⁷⁰ *ibid.*

³⁷¹ *ibid.*

³⁷² Migliore, *Faith Seeking*, p. 272.

multicultural ministry – to help the church see when it needs to be *paradoxically partisan*.

Migliore insists that ecclesial inclusiveness does not mean failure to take a stand on issues of justice and peace for then we risk making reconciliation a meaningless and cheap word for avoiding all conflicts.

³⁷³ However, he cautions against ecclesial partisanship that has no catholic or inclusive purpose for while universality is possible only through particularity, without universality as its aim particularity is meaningless.³⁷⁴

Multiculturalism in the Early Church

Clearly, to be Christ's multicultural church is a huge task and is not easy. But that is the costly way of Christ and it is the calling of those who follow him as his disciples. To be Christ's church is not only to actively model his inclusive love to the world, it is also to be a force or movement for justice and inclusiveness in the world. So it is fair to suggest that the imperative for the multicultural and inclusive church is rooted in Christ's gospel and it is written into the Christian DNA. There are serious implications here for how to be church and what it means to be church in a very culturally diverse twenty first century.

³⁷³ Migliore is clear that if the partisan act of the church is not "intentionally universal" then it is not "the partisanship of God but a divisive and destructive party spirit." Migliore, *Faith Seeking*, pp. 270.

³⁷⁴ *ibid.*

In the very least, the gospel imperative for the multicultural church should compel twenty first century Christians as far as humanly possible to form ecclesial communities that faithfully reflect that rich diversity which is God's gift in its whole life.

Fortunately, Christians need not look far for support in this respect. The Bible is a rich resource for multicultural ministry and church given that it collects thoughts and accounts from a long stretch of history – from the ancient Patriarchal to the Egyptian, Mesopotamian, Babylonian, Greek and Roman eras – and their various cultures and values. In a word, it is important to recognise that the Bible itself is multicultural and that it gives an account of a culturally diverse people in a culturally diverse world.³⁷⁵

The discerning reader of both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament should come to the conclusion that the multicultural church is not at all a new phenomenon as the earliest ecclesial formations were multicultural and multilingual from the outset. The painful yet vibrant emergence of Christ's multicultural Church is graphically recounted all through the book of ACTS and illustrated in the letters of Paul.³⁷⁶ All along the empowering and enabling force for embracing

³⁷⁵The emphasis here is the multicultural nature of the Bible so “when we bring multicultural perspectives” to it we are paying “homage to its multicultural nature.” K. Tahaafe-Williams et al, Mission and Ministry in Multicultural Contexts, (London: CWM Europe, 2009), p.10.

³⁷⁶Tahaafe-Williams in International Review of Mission, p.21.

diversity in the growing church was none other than the very Spirit of God.³⁷⁷

The multicultural reality in the early church suggests that the call to a culturally inclusive church, characterised by mutual recognition, acceptance, and sharing was not only normative to what it meant to be church then, it was the very heart of the Christian calling. From its very inception at Pentecost the Christian Church was multicultural and multilingual.³⁷⁸ Amazingly, a fearful and uncertain group of a hundred and twenty led by Peter grew to three thousand by the end of the day. (Acts 2: 41) Through the inspiring and moving power of the Spirit of God, this multicultural crowd “from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem [who] welcomed Peter’s message” were baptised and then “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of the bread and the prayers.”(Acts 2: 5, 42)

Indeed, the story of the inauguration of Christ’s Church and its development throughout the early centuries after Christ’s death and ascension places the reality of cultural diversity right at the heart and the beginnings of the Christian faith. In the words of Curtiss De Young et al:

On the day of Pentecost the Jerusalem congregation grew from 120 Galilean Jews to over 3,000 multicultural, multilingual Jews.

³⁷⁷ Tahaafe-Williams, IRM, p.21.

³⁷⁸ ibid.

Several thousand more were added in the days that followed. The church was multicultural and multilingual from the first moment of its existence.³⁷⁹ (Acts 2:41, 4:4, 5:14, 6:7)

Throughout the book of Acts we witness an emerging ecclesial community wrestling with multicultural issues that were absolutely central to being church. There was the issue of the neglected Hellenist widows in the “daily distribution of food” in Acts 6 and we witness in Chapter 15 the cultural differences between Jews and Gentiles rearing its daunting head again. It is worth noting that the way the church dealt with the Hellenist widow’s issue in Acts 6 is a good example of multicultural leadership and of multicultural ministry in practice.

Clearly, breaking down walls and crossing cultural and other social barriers was characteristic of Jesus’ ministry before his crucifixion, and it continued to be central to the life and development of the early church. The stories of Jesus and the Canaanite woman (Matthew 15: 21-28) and Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4: 1-42) demonstrate clearly the cultural tensions between Jews and Gentiles and how Jesus transcended these cultural boundaries.

In Acts 15 the issue regarding the inclusion of the Gentiles amongst those to be saved (specifically whether Gentile converts should be circumcised) caused disagreements in the church at Antioch. So Paul

³⁷⁹ De Young, C.P., et al, United by Faith: The Multiracial Congregation as an Answer to the Problem of Race, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p.22.

and Barnabas were dispatched to the church in Jerusalem to petition the council of apostles and elders to decide on the matter. There Peter, drawing on his powerful vision of diversity in Chapter 10, convinced James and the council that the Gentiles “will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus” just as the rest of them would be. (Acts 15: 7-11)

Gordon Dicker notes the fact that for Jews, including many Christian Jews, the Gentiles represented a threat to the “set-apartness of Jews from all other races.”³⁸⁰ Paul, when he was still known as Saul, was determined to destroy the early church because it was promoting the breaking down of the wall between Jews and Gentiles. Saul’s zeal to maintain the law that set Israel apart from all other races and cultures as the elect people of God led him to persist on persecuting the early church. Devout Jews like Saul strictly observed the law thereby preserving their separateness.

Then Saul experienced a life-changing conversion when he encountered the risen Christ on the way to Damascus. (Acts 9) James Dunn writes:

It was the experience of seeing Jesus risen and exalted on the road to Damascus which stopped him dead in his tracks and turned his whole life into a new channel.³⁸¹

³⁸⁰G. Dicker, “Theological Perspective on Multiculturalism”, in Yoo-Crowe (ed.), The Vision of a Multicultural Church, (Sydney: UCA National Assembly, 1998), p.9.

³⁸¹J. Dunn, Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity, 3rd Edn, (London: SCM Press, 2006), p.203.

Through his conversion Paul accepted that "God's purpose in Jesus was to break down the distinction" between the Jews and Gentiles creating "one new people."³⁸² For Paul it was a personal experience of God's grace in Christ as "unmerited and free acceptance" that opened his eyes to see that Gentiles too are worthy of that same grace without having to first become culturally and religiously Jewish.³⁸³ That dramatic experience so thoroughly transformed Saul that he became known as the apostle Paul, passionately advocating and growing Christ's multicultural Church in which Jews and Gentiles were equally recognised as followers of Jesus Christ. Dicker reiterates:

Paul's argument is that no one, either Jew or Gentile, is justified by works of the law (i.e. the things that make Jews distinctive such as circumcision and food laws), rather it is by grace through faith that all people are justified.³⁸⁴

Certainly, Paul's original teaching of justification by faith strongly influenced the early church which was multicultural and multiracial with "Jewish Christians, Africans, Greeks, Roman citizens, and even people from as far away as India [who] welcomed one another and worshipped together."³⁸⁵ This brings us to a profoundly significant point in the development of the early multicultural church.

³⁸² Dicker in Yoo-Crowe, The Vision, p. 9.

³⁸³ Dunn, Unity and Diversity, p.206.

³⁸⁴ Dicker in Yoo-Crowe, The Vision, p.9.

³⁸⁵ Dicker in Yoo-Crowe, The Vision, p.10.

The Pauline argument for the inclusion of Gentiles in the church expressed in terms of *justification by grace through faith* was very significant. This barrier-breaking teaching by Paul needs to be reclaimed as an integral part of the multicultural ecclesial vision, and be recognised by contemporary Christians today for how Paul intended it and how he used it. Paul applied this teaching, now widely known as the *doctrine of justification by faith*, in the first instance to a *racial/cultural* issue that was preoccupying the thinking of the early church. (Gal.2: 15-16) James Dunn depicts Paul as the “most dominant figure of first generation Christianity [negotiating] mutual relations of Jews and Gentiles within mixed Christian communities.”³⁸⁶

Dicker makes the significant point that “there has been a serious loss” in how Christians have thought about being church, and in the development of the multicultural imperative for being church over the centuries, because of a universal failure to recognise this “context of racialism in which Paul expounded” the doctrine of justification.³⁸⁷

Dunn’s account of the early church places the beginning of this failure of recognition right after Paul’s death around 70CE, when the Christian Church feared becoming too Hellenized and being totally severed from its Jewish roots.³⁸⁸ Coupled with misgivings over heretic appropriation

³⁸⁶ Dunn, *Unity and Diversity*, p.205, 273.

³⁸⁷ Dicker in Yoo-Crowe, *The Vision*, p.9.

³⁸⁸ Dunn, *Unity and Diversity*, p.321.

of Pauline teachings, there was concerted effort to reclaim Pauline theology as integral to orthodoxy. As Dunn puts it, the Paul that emerged was the “Paul of the Pastorals, the Paul of Acts [whose] antithesis between law and gospel was muted, whose central teaching on justification by grace through faith alone was scarcely to be seen.”³⁸⁹ So even in the early days the racial-ethnic context of the Pauline doctrine of justification by faith was being blotted out.

Moreover, the shift in the church’s status from a “barely tolerated and a vigorously persecuted organisation” under a hostile pagan state to becoming the state church with the conversion of the emperor Constantine in the fourth century only further diminished that racial-ethnic connection.³⁹⁰ De Young et al explains that right up to the second century, the early Christians remained true to the gospel imperative for multicultural inclusiveness until the church became more aligned and identified with the Roman Empire and the culture of the elite at which point the “faith that united them [was] co-opted and the church became divided by faith.”³⁹¹

Another feature in the disconnection between the Pauline justification by faith doctrine and its racial-ethnic roots was the shift in Church authority from the east where it originated to the west. As we have

³⁸⁹ Dunn, Unity and Diversity, p.322.

³⁹⁰ McGrath, Christian Theology, p.393.

³⁹¹ De Young et al, United by Faith, p.37.

seen in Acts 15 the authority of the first-century Church was in Jerusalem where the apostle James played a leading role in the council of apostles and elders. In the first four centuries the churches in "Alexandria, Antioch, Constantinople, Jerusalem, and Rome were held in wide esteem [but] by the end of the fourth century it was becoming increasingly clear that Rome, as the centre of the Roman Empire, had acquired a position of especial prominence."³⁹² Put another way, the Christian Church and Faith were well on the way to becoming absolutely dominated by the Gentile west - a development equally damaging for the multicultural vision as entrenched Jewish separatism, because it was simply a substitution of one form of cultural hegemony and supremacy for another.

A key contributing factor to the severing of the Pauline doctrine of justification by faith from its racial-ethnic origins was Martin Luther's interpretation of the doctrine in the 16th century European Reformation. Luther understood the Pauline doctrine as making available God's salvation to each person, not due to any personal good deeds but by grace through faith in Christ. Carl Lindberg's account of the Reformation spotlights prevailing medieval theology which viewed the gospel in terms of the "righteousness of God as the standard that sinners had to meet in order to achieve salvation."³⁹³ According to

³⁹² McGrath, Christian Theology, p. 394.

³⁹³ C. Lindberg, The European Reformations, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), p. 69.

Lindberg, Luther was so disturbed by what he called “the monster of uncertainty that left consciences in doubt of their salvation” that he felt compelled to employ Paul’s justification by faith doctrine to turn “the medieval piety of achievement on its head.”³⁹⁴ Dicker asserts that Luther equated “works of the law” not with circumcision and other Jewish traditions, but with individual “good deeds of any kind by which we might seek to establish our own worth and merit” so as to be acceptable to God.³⁹⁵

Whilst this is not a rejection of the Lutheran notion of the doctrine of justification, it is important to note that Luther had decisively severed a critical and significant Pauline argument for breaking down cultural barriers, for growing culturally inclusive communities of Christ, i.e. the multicultural church from its multicultural context and moorings. Luther gave the Pauline doctrine of justification a rather individualistic understanding that continues to hold currency with Christians today. For Paul it was a principle of inclusiveness, it was about being included in the community. For Luther it was a principle of individual salvation. One would have to look far and wide to find contemporary Christians who associate the doctrine of justification with the ecclesial vision of multicultural inclusiveness.

³⁹⁴ Lindberg, The European, p.67, 70.

³⁹⁵ Dicker in Yoo-Crowe, The Vision, p.10.

Dicker names the final nail in the coffin of this failure of recognition as the “eventual development within the Christian West of nation states which were largely mono-cultural” thereby perpetuating the ignorance of successive generations of Christians regarding “the multicultural nature of Christianity.”³⁹⁶

Biblical and Theological Rooting

The multicultural ecclesial vision is not only rooted in the New Testament Church, which as we have seen was multicultural and multilingual from the start, it is also a thoroughly biblical approach to being church. It affirms the faith that the Holy Spirit moves the church to bear witness to our essential unity in Christ whilst at the same time respecting and accepting cultural uniqueness. Moreover, it affirms the theological understanding that in God’s providence we are placed in a multicultural world and society and our calling therefore is to bear witness to Christ’s power to break down the walls that keep humanity separated from God and one another.³⁹⁷

The biblical theme of “a house of prayer for all peoples and nations” seen in both the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament further

³⁹⁶ Dicker in Yoo-Crowe, The Vision, p.10.

³⁹⁷ Tahaafe-Williams & Ackroyd, Multicultural Ministry, p.4.

emphasises the biblical rooting of the multicultural ecclesial vision. Isaiah 56:7 witnesses to God's vision for a house of prayer for all peoples where they will be welcomed, recognised and honoured.

De Young et al affirm that Jesus' "vision of a house of prayer that was for all the nations was a precursor" to the emerging multicultural churches that his apostles and early followers built in his name.³⁹⁸ This vision was realised at Pentecost where people from all nations gathered in one place and received the gift of the Holy Spirit. Pentecost not only provided a taste of God's multicultural kingdom, it also affirmed the notion that there is no more obvious way to live God's kingdom on earth than being a church that is visibly and fully multicultural.³⁹⁹

We have seen the centrality of the multicultural vision in Luke's account of the ministry of the apostles in Acts and in the ministry of Paul. John of Patmos envisions an *ecclesia* of "the multitude from every nation" in the Book of Revelation:

After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands. They cried in a loud voice, saying: "Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb." (Rev. 7: 9-10)

³⁹⁸ De Young et al, United by Faith, p.20.

³⁹⁹ *ibid.*

According to Justo Gonzalez, "no other book in the New Testament deals with the issue of the coming together of a variety of peoples and cultures as repeatedly nor as specifically as does the book of Revelation."⁴⁰⁰ Gonzalez sees the entire book as a liturgical vision that culminates in John's image of a multicultural worshipping *ecclesia* - "the future from which God is calling us."⁴⁰¹ These biblical narratives are extensions of what was incarnate in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ, and they bear witness to the barrier-breaking mission of God. We are reminded that while Jesus may have begun his ministry primarily with the "lost children of Israel" (Matt. 10) he also ministered to gentiles. Dicker affirms Jesus' ultimate concern for the whole world as made evident in "the great missionary commission in Matthew 28 where the apostles are sent to make disciples of all nations."⁴⁰²

To assert that the multicultural ecclesial vision is written into the Christian DNA is to assert that being multicultural and inclusive is central and integral to the nature and purpose of Christ's Church. It is not however a denial of human realities, for a vision is still in the realm of the ideal. Christ makes the call and sets the standard. The church, made up of very fallible human beings, responds with the associated challenges. So the gospel imperative for the multicultural church does not presuppose a smooth-running ecclesial community.

⁴⁰⁰ J. Gonzalez, For the Healing of the Nations, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002), p.69.

⁴⁰¹ Gonzalez, For the Healing, p.112.

⁴⁰² Dicker in Yoo-Crowe, The Vision, p.8.

As is demonstrated by the New Testament accounts of the early church, the reality of being multicultural was both fact and ideal. The church in fact comprised of members from culturally diverse backgrounds, but the capacity to live into the gospel values of mutual recognition, acceptance, and just sharing needed to be developed with constant and intentional attention and work. And to the credit of the apostles and leaders of the early Christian Church, they did take the multicultural nature of the church very seriously.

Fast track two thousand years and the image of the Christian Church is not quite the same. Whilst cultural diversity continues to be a central concern for twenty first century ecclesiology and mission, as Ramachandra points out, Christianity's "centre of gravity [is] no longer in Europe and North America, but in Africa, Latin America, and Asia."⁴⁰³ Whilst this is true largely due to pervasive post-modern secularism in the western context, ecclesial authority and power which come with control of considerable wealth still resides in the western Church. So, the Christian west continues to be dominant.

Moreover, the face of Christianity in the west itself is increasingly becoming more visibly diverse. Unprecedented global migration plus the growing population of refugees and asylum seekers have forced

⁴⁰³V. Ramachandra, Subverting Global Myths, p.133.

the mono-culturally oriented nation states of the west and their churches to face up to the multicultural realities of the twenty first century and the multicultural nature of Christ's Church.

Gonzalez highlights the truly global nature of migration, beginning at "the dawn of the modern age, with the migration of Europeans, first to the Western Hemisphere, and then to South Africa, Australia, New Zealand, and the rest of the world."⁴⁰⁴ Now, even places in the global South that are not typically appealing to immigrants are receiving migrants, some as holding centres for refugees and asylum seekers.

In the last couple of decades it is estimated that hundreds of thousands of non-white Christians in European countries like Britain and the Netherlands constitute the most active membership of mainline and independent churches and therefore have changed the face of western Christianity dramatically.⁴⁰⁵ It can no longer be taken for granted that Christians and churches in western countries comprise of whites only. For many western churches this is indeed a new and bewildering development.⁴⁰⁶ For many white Christians coming to terms with such cultural diversity is hugely challenging.

⁴⁰⁴ Gonzalez, For the Healing, p.5.

⁴⁰⁵ Tahaafe-Williams et al, Ministry and Mission, p.23.

⁴⁰⁶ Tahaafe-Williams et al, Ministry and Mission, p.21.

A fundamental issue is that of adaptability – that is, the capacity for adapting is critical in order to participate fully in the life and witness of the multicultural church.⁴⁰⁷ Indeed, for minorities living in a dominant cultural context the ability to adapt is an essential requirement for survival. This idea of adaptability is what Fulkerson calls “situational competence” which is an inherently flexible and habituated capacity to incorporate practices and maneuver knowledge and resources to survive in a racist society.⁴⁰⁸

Gonzalez explains that having grown accustomed to “seeing the gospel of Christ expressed only or primarily in terms of their own dominant culture”, the multicultural church now requires white Christians to make individual, collective, and institutional adjustments in order to engage the gospel from the perspectives of diverse cultures.⁴⁰⁹ Gonzalez is convinced this is “the most difficult aspect of becoming a multicultural church in a multicultural world” because it is a huge challenge to embrace diverse *others* without falling into assimilationist tendencies that compel the *other* to become just like *us* in order to be accepted.⁴¹⁰ He writes:

The multicultural vision is sweet. But there is also a bitter side to it. There is the bitter side of having to declare that the vision of many peoples, many tribes, many nations, and many languages involves much more than bringing a bit of colour and folklore into our traditional worship services. It involves radical changes

⁴⁰⁷ Gonzalez, For the Healing, p.91.

⁴⁰⁸ Fulkerson, Places of Redemption, p.42.

⁴⁰⁹ Gonzalez, For the Healing, p.92.

⁴¹⁰ Gonzalez, For the Healing, p.90.

in the way we understand ourselves, and in the way we run our business.⁴¹¹

Fulkerson's experience of a racially mixed church in the US gives hope for the realisation of the multicultural vision through what she calls "practices of formation, worship, homemaking, and biblical study."⁴¹² She describes the liturgy and worship as formation practices in this church and how the various elements contribute to creating a multicultural place where:

Welcome meant a way of feeling included, accepted, and that others are interested in you. Welcome also meant a response to the inherited exclusions of history and society, the inclusion of people from different classes, races, nationalities, and abilities. From the confession and self-scrutiny that marked the need for change in individuals to the performed call for transformation in worship, to the logic of discomfort as a first moment in attention to social difference, conviction for change resonated in several directions.⁴¹³

Failing to make the necessary changes, the image we get is that of a church that *welcomes* different peoples, as long as they do not object to being "dominated by the same nation and tribe and people and language."⁴¹⁴ (Rev. 10: 11) This is not a true image of the multicultural church.

Naturally, serious consideration needs to be given to queries about what it means in practice to be a multicultural church. What might

⁴¹¹ Gonzalez, For the Healing, p. 92.

⁴¹² Fulkerson, Places of Redemption, p.208.

⁴¹³ *ibid.*

⁴¹⁴ Gonzalez, For the Healing, p.92.

such a church look like? Is it appropriate as an approach to being church in the 21st century? Can it address issues of ecclesiology, theology, and mission adequately? How far can it challenge exclusionary practices within a church? Can a multicultural church be a model of social inclusion that challenges exclusionary practices in society as a whole? Do any conclusions follow regarding the wider concept of multiculturalism?

Indeed, there are overlapping concerns raised here and some have been dealt with in some way elsewhere in the study. Nevertheless, briefly, the study presupposes a multicultural church as one that is racial-ethnically and culturally diverse in its membership and intentionally lives and witnesses as a multicultural community in its whole life and in all that it does.⁴¹⁵ Recognising that there are contexts in which such a cultural mix in the ecclesial community are not possible, homogeneous churches can still strive to live and witness in multicultural ways that reflect God's diverse gifts in everything it does. De Young et al will not let such churches off the hook:

Yet even congregations in such settings must operate as New Testament congregations. They should be crossing any ethnic lines that exist: Germans and Italians, Vietnamese and Laotian, Trinidadian and Haitian, and the like. Also congregations that are in racially isolated areas should develop partnerships with congregations in other areas that are diverse and they should educate themselves as though next year their community will diversify.⁴¹⁶

⁴¹⁵ Tahaafe-Williams & Ackroyd, Multicultural Ministry, p.8.

⁴¹⁶ De Young et al, United by Faith, p.142.

There are, for example, some rural contexts where Christians would respond to the multicultural vision dismissively or with perplexity only to find a short time later that their monochrome community has suddenly grown more diverse. In that case, the question is why aren't Christian churches on the front line of welcoming such new neighbours?

To reiterate, the multicultural church is absolutely appropriate as an approach to being church. It is biblically mandated, it is a gospel imperative. De Young et al are convinced of the multicultural imperative as rooted in the gospel and in early church traditions and they have no hesitation declaring that the first-century church was a "movement for social unity across the great divide of culture, tradition, class, and race."⁴¹⁷

The study therefore maintains that the nature of the Christian church is multicultural and it is even more compelling as a way of being church in the twenty first century. Significantly, acknowledging the changing face of western Christianity clearly anticipates the visible impact of cultural diversity in the missionary intent of western churches as they seek to proclaim the good news, teach, serve, act for

⁴¹⁷ De Young et al, United by Faith, p.37.

justice, protect and maintain the integrity of God's creation.⁴¹⁸ It signals the inevitable influence of cultural diversity in the ecclesiology, theology, liturgy, and worship of western Christianity.⁴¹⁹

The multicultural ecclesial vision can only enhance the church's capacity to be true to its mission calling. To be clear, our focus here is church as the body of Christ in its universal, national, and local expressions. The Church universal is in fact unalterably multicultural because to state the obvious the world is. The church in its national denominational form is multicultural in membership but the issue of reflecting that diversity in its whole life and witness is ongoing. The church as the body of Christ in its local expression is where the multicultural vision can be most effectively lived and witnessed to. In a real sense, the latter two forms of church are where the multicultural imperative and vision can expect to encounter more challenging obstacles, but are nevertheless where Christ's call to being truly multicultural expressions of his body must find root and bear fruit.

Unfortunately, in practice western Christianity and churches are still a long way from actually living the multicultural ecclesial vision. Some progress has been made but they have been at best incremental and underwhelming. Church ministries and life continue to be white

⁴¹⁸ The five marks of mission are discussed further in chapter three.

⁴¹⁹ Tahaafe-Williams et al, Mission and Ministry, p.26.

dominated and Eurocentric. It is significant that at a time when western Christianity faces more cultural diversity within and beyond its confines than ever before, such diversity remain largely silent and invisible in the ordering of the ecclesial community, in the processes of formation and training for ordination, in leadership, in liturgy and worship, and in decision-making and governance. Recognising these as ongoing concerns, the Committee for Minority Ethnic Anglican Concerns in its report to the General Synod of the Church of England in 2007 stated:

The responsibility of making certain that all people in the Church are not only present, but valued as equal participants, is not simply about human justice, political correctness, social 'balancing', or even good manners. Fundamentally, it is an expression of the Church's core belief in God's reconciling work within his human creation, and the impact of our actions in matters of ultimate destiny.⁴²⁰

If anything, the more visible developments have been the increase in the number of mono-cultural independent churches outside mainline denominations and entrenched mono-culturalism within mainline churches. For instance, the numbers of *new* (i.e. independent) churches that have emerged in European countries like Britain and the Netherlands have increased dramatically in the last three decades.⁴²¹

⁴²⁰Committee Minority Ethnic Affairs Concerns, Present and Participating: A Place at the Table, (London: Archbishop's Council, 2007), p.1

⁴²¹ Tahaafe-Williams et al, Mission and Ministry, p.26. De Young et al note that mono-cultural congregations in the American context emerge "in response to white racism [and] in response to particular needs not being addressed by predominantly white congregations." De Young, United by Faith, p. 129.

There are many reasons for this development. Some have to do with convenience and/or comfort, for some it is felt that spiritual needs are best met in mono-cultural settings. For many migrants, the pull towards new independent churches or to mono-culturalism within mainline churches is often “a reaction to the real risk of being subsumed in the dominant culture and society.”⁴²² The study maintains that while all these may be legitimate reasons, they are not excuses for failing to live up to God’s call to the multicultural *ecclesia*.

Some may suggest that such developments as the increasing number of independent churches and the persistence of mono-culturalism within mainline churches could well be signalling the shape of the church for the future. But the overwhelming evidence we see today is the rapidly declining numbers in western mainline churches - yes in their overwhelmingly mono-cultural congregations. In my current role I see too many such congregations that are dying with no prospect of growth at all.

In my experience and observation over the past two decades the churches that are vibrant and growing with long term life prospects are characteristically multicultural ones. Even the growth of new independent churches are not so reassuring since at least in my experience and knowledge of such groups in Australia, many of them

⁴²² Tahaafe-Williams, *IRM*, p. 23.

have been formed out of schisms and splits. In the course of my work I see too many such emerging groups that are so small that issues of viability are very real.

Nevertheless such developments have implications for western Christianity, and pose significant implications for the mission priorities of *old* (i.e. mainline) western churches. It would seem that a major universal characteristic of the Church Catholic is the inability to adapt so as to enable rich multicultural vibrant life and witness. Clearly, twenty first century Christianity and churches continue to struggle with difference and diversity.

For Dicker the Pauline doctrine of justification as a key tool for helping twenty first century Christianity deal with racial-ethnic diversity is ever more compelling. He explains:

The doctrine means that as God accepts us all in our differences through Christ, so we are to accept one another, without first requiring everyone else to become like us and without having to become like them.⁴²³

Seeing the “fear of difference and reverence for sameness” as disabling factors in the quest for true ecclesial multicultural inclusiveness, Dicker promotes the exuberant celebration of difference for its value in making us more “interesting and enriching to one

⁴²³ Dicker in Yoo-Crowe, The Vision, p.11.

another.⁴²⁴ The reverence for sameness is so deeply entrenched that even proponents of difference regularly promote sameness in the same breath they urge the celebration of difference. For example, in a Sydney rally in support of refugee and asylum seekers, one speaker was emphatic about celebrating differences because underneath we are all the same.⁴²⁵

Highlighting the tension between gospel and culture Dicker maintains that accepting other peoples' cultural differences in the multicultural church requires humble honesty and openness about one's own cultural bias. Andrew Kirk explains that we tend to be so "immersed in our own culture that it is hard to see its defects – or to see the strengths and goodness of other cultures."⁴²⁶ Recognising as a real concern the problem of cultural distortion of the gospel, Dicker writes:

Rarely do we recognise how our own culture distorts the gospel. We too readily assume that the way we understand it is the way it really is. If people of other backgrounds understand it differently, it must be because they are led into wrong thinking by their culture. In fact, none of us is exempt from cultural distortion and the confusion of mixing the gospel with our own values. We must not be too uncritical of culture, especially our own.⁴²⁷

In a similar vein Robert Crotty would argue that in a multicultural society and church, "we are not required to be uncritical of our own

⁴²⁴ Dicker in Yoo-Crowe, The Vision, p.11.

⁴²⁵ At Parramatta Park in Sydney on Saturday 22 June 2013.

⁴²⁶ Andrew Kirk, What is Mission? Theological Explorations, (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1999), p.78.

⁴²⁷ Dicker in Yoo-Crowe, The Vision, p.11.

culture.”⁴²⁸ With this in mind, culture can then be utilised more helpfully as the indispensable medium through which the gospel is understood, as well as opening culture up to be critiqued and judged by the gospel. So the relationship between gospel and culture is necessarily dialectic. Naturally, this allows for “different cultural perspectives on the gospel to stand side by side [which] can lead to a truer picture” and minimizes distortion.⁴²⁹ This is a fundamental rationale for why multicultural church is the gospel mandate for being church at any place and at any time. Dicker writes:

In a world in which people remain sinners even when justified, monoculturalism can easily lead to selective blindness and bias. While multiculturalism cannot guarantee an error-free view, it does hold out the promise of a more balanced view of reality and the gospel. For this and other reasons, the New Testament neither calls for nor envisions a monocultural world nor a monocultural church. It never suggests that God will be glorified by undifferentiated sameness. Rather it declares that God is glorified by people who are different in many ways accepting one another as Christ has accepted us.⁴³⁰ (Rom. 15: 7)

A Call to Act Justly

There is no denying that God’s call to be multicultural in how we are church has clear implications for how the ecclesial community is ordered and how its diverse membership relates to each other. It is not just a gospel imperative, it is also a call to live and act justly. It

⁴²⁸Robert Crotty, “Multiculturalism and Religious Pluralism: Interaction and Overlap”, in N. Habel (ed.), Religion and Multiculturalism in Australia, (Adelaide: AASR, 1992), p.34.

⁴²⁹Dicker in Yoo-Crowe, The Vision, p.12.

⁴³⁰ibid.

makes sense then to see the task of making disciples of all nations (Matt. 28: 18-20) as one that goes hand in hand with the *year of Jubilee* which requires prisoners to be made free, the blind be made to see, and the oppressed to be released from bondage.⁴³¹ (Luke 4: 18-19)

The multicultural church is therefore called to not only give careful attention to issues of justice in how different groups are treated and relate to each other in society, but it must also be attentive to questions of justice within its own life. Queries about how to live and witness together in “love, equality, and peace”, how to “ensure all voices are heard”, and how to “share properties and resources with justice and generosity” become paramount.⁴³² Being a multicultural *ecclesia* demands the church’s response to the cries of all, both within and beyond the church community.⁴³³

The multicultural requirement is that the church takes very seriously its responsibility to live and act justly in all aspects of its life and witness. In short, a truly multicultural *ecclesia* is one where racial equality is normative! It does not settle for incremental instances of racial justice. It insists on racial equality as fundamental to its identity. A truly multicultural church does not ignore the social issues of

⁴³¹ Tahaafe-Williams et al, Mission and Ministry, p.27.

⁴³² Dicker in Yoo-Crowe, The Vision, p.13.

⁴³³ *ibid.*

“discrimination, distribution of wealth, power, and access to education, housing and jobs.”⁴³⁴

From an institutional and structural perspective, “how church resources are shared, how decisions are made and by whom, how the church witnesses to Christ’s inclusive love, are key issues of justice that must be addressed if the church is to be true to its multicultural calling.”⁴³⁵ At a local setting, a congregation may have a multicultural membership, but “as long as decision-making and power are in the hands of a particular racial, ethnic, or cultural group”, then fundamentally it has failed to act justly and has not fulfilled the requirements of a multicultural church.⁴³⁶

In addition to affirming the theological, biblical, and historical basis for the multicultural Church of Jesus Christ, De Young et al promote the idea that the 21st century must be the century of the multicultural church.⁴³⁷ Convinced that the future of Christianity depends on practical, living examples of authentic, reconciling multicultural inclusive communities, they sketch a portrait of a multicultural church that emphasizes “witness to faith in Christ, affirm all people as fully human and created in the image of God, respect a wide range of culturally influenced theological perspectives, address racism in

⁴³⁴ Tahaafe-Williams, *IRM*, p.22.

⁴³⁵ *ibid.*

⁴³⁶ Tahaafe-Williams, *IRM*, p.22.

⁴³⁷ De Young et al, *United by Faith*, p.2.

society and in the church, embrace a new congregational culture, and provide a refuge to all who are battered by racism in society."⁴³⁸

However, De Young et al report that in contemporary America racial integration is evident in secular institutions such as schools, corporations, government departments and even in the entertainment industry, but the Christian church remains largely untouched by this development.⁴³⁹ For them, Martin Luther King Jnr's famous statement that Sunday morning worship was the most segregated hour in the United States of America is still very much a reality in the 21st century.⁴⁴⁰ In that situation, whether it is forced segregation or willing segregation, it is still segregation.

Whilst not so graphically segregated along racial lines as the American churches, that experience highlights the continuing reality that too many churches are still rather untouched by efforts at cultural inclusion. There is widespread misconception that the ecclesial vision for multicultural inclusiveness is really only for the benefit of people of minority ethnic backgrounds. Hence, a multicultural church is really a special-interest concern to do with *them* but not with *us*. This misconception is most typically articulated by white Christians who

⁴³⁸ De Young et al, United by Faith, p.144.

⁴³⁹ It is alarming that there does not seem to be much change in the American Church today from 1929 when W.E.B DuBois wrote: "The American Church of Christ is Jim Crowed from top to bottom. No other institution in America is built so thoroughly or more absolutely on the color line. Everybody knows this." quoted in De Young et al, United by Faith, p.61.

⁴⁴⁰ De Young et al, United by Faith, p.5.

insist that the call to being multicultural is “not an issue because we don’t have *them* in our neighbourhood.”⁴⁴¹

Unsurprisingly, this misconception influences how western churches respond to God’s call to mission, how they shape and prioritise their ministries, and how they allocate their resources.⁴⁴² The failure to live up to the call to multicultural inclusion translates into exclusion, inequality and marginalization. These are injustices that churches should find intolerable for otherwise their legitimacy as Christ’s communities come into question.

Put another way, in Christ’s radically inclusive body, the pain of injustice experienced by any member of the body diminishes and undermines the health and wholeness of the whole body. This Pauline ecclesial imagery of the body of Christ demonstrates the point eloquently. For what is at stake is the well-being and health of no less than the whole Church – the Body of Christ. So, “when the hands suffer, the whole body suffers, and when the head is injured, the whole body is affected.”⁴⁴³ As Paul puts it, “if one member suffer, all suffer together with it; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together with it.” (1 Cor. 12: 12-26) Definitely, the call to the multicultural church has everything to do with the well-being of the whole Body so

⁴⁴¹ Tahaafe-Williams, IRM, p.23.

⁴⁴² *ibid.*

⁴⁴³ Tahaafe-Williams, IRM, p.23.

being multicultural is an integral part of the Church's life, touching and enriching every aspect of it. There is nothing *special-interest* about that. On the contrary, it is in everybody's interest.

Differences in theology and traditions have certainly played their part as blockages to living God's multicultural vision. Many minority ethnic Christians and churches in the west are perceived as very conservative and "holding outdated theological views" that are at best "naïve faith."⁴⁴⁴ On the other hand, there is a widely held view amongst minority ethnic Christian communities in the west that western Christianity has become so theologically liberal that the Christian faith, its values, and most of all the Word of God, have become so compromised and so diluted that Christianity's very existence is at risk.⁴⁴⁵ Obviously, the reality is more complex for there are equally as many white conservative Christians if not more, and stunningly, some alliances have been known to emerge within the Christian west between nonwhite conservatives and white liberals over matters of social justice.⁴⁴⁶

While the multicultural imperative allows for thoughtful listening and understanding in dealing with a plurality of opinions, often the

⁴⁴⁴ Tahaafe-Williams et al, Mission and Ministry, p.26.

⁴⁴⁵ *ibid.*

⁴⁴⁶ Many Christian migrants with theologically conservative views hold strong positions on issues of justice as well. Tahaafe-Williams et al, Mission and Ministry, p.26.

response is to drift into monocultural mode or to “live and let live.”⁴⁴⁷ Put another way, tolerance is the default response which often translates into withdrawal into one’s own community or comfort zone, and/or the neglect of fellow Christians.⁴⁴⁸ The multicultural ecclesial vision calls for respectful engagement, aiming at acceptance, and seeking partnership in those situations.⁴⁴⁹

Similarly, responding to the multicultural vision is often greatly hindered by differences in cultural traditions and customs. Minority ethnic churches are often held captive to “uncontested notions of tradition” that have become means of stifling the voices of sections of the community that are hidden from the public space.⁴⁵⁰ The multicultural vision calls for the provision of space for “open dialogue and reflection in which both men and women can assess and unpack any abusive practices that have been legitimized as cultural norms.”⁴⁵¹ It makes no allowances for the misuse “of culture and tradition to mask behaviour that are wrong, dishonest, and immoral.”⁴⁵²

Indeed, any archaic customs that cause harm especially to the vulnerable must either be transformed or rejected. A serious commitment “to embody God’s justice” requires owning up to such

⁴⁴⁷ Tahaafe-Williams et al, Mission and Ministry p.27.

⁴⁴⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁴⁹ Tahaafe-Williams et al, Mission and Ministry, p.27.

⁴⁵⁰ Tahaafe-Williams, *IRM*, p.24

⁴⁵¹ *ibid.*

⁴⁵² Tahaafe-Williams, *IRM*, p.25.

practices with integrity, allowing the Holy Spirit of God to bring transformation and reconciliation. To be sure, maintaining “death-dealing traditions” is a squandering of “grace-filled and creative opportunities to grow as multicultural and inclusive communities of Christ.”⁴⁵³

Drawing again on Revelation 7: 9-10, Gonzalez suggests that the call to multicultural inclusiveness is a call to contemporary Christianity and churches to embrace John of Patmos’ vision as the future out of which we must live.⁴⁵⁴ He asserts that “the church lives not only out of its past, but also out of its future” and since “its beginning was multicultural as depicted at Pentecost, its end is also multicultural as John’s vision clearly shows.”⁴⁵⁵ Convinced that this vision of God’s multicultural future is really “what it is all about” Gonzalez writes:

If we really believe that this is the future toward which God’s history is moving, we had better live out of that future, and not out of some other. When the church refuses to live out of that future, its witness is hardly credible.⁴⁵⁶

For Gonzalez John’s vision is calling the church to live into God’s multicultural future with integrity which means we “talk about the coming of the Reign of God”, and we behave as if the Reign of God is

⁴⁵³ Tahaafe-Williams, *IRM*, p.25.

⁴⁵⁴ Gonzalez, *For the Healing*, p. 103.

⁴⁵⁵ Gonzalez, *For the Healing*, p.104.

⁴⁵⁶ *ibid.*

here.⁴⁵⁷ It is not good enough just talking, the multicultural imperative requires the church to walk the talk too. Further, there are “important socio-political implications” associated with John’s vision of “the Reign of God.”⁴⁵⁸ Revelation 7 continues to paint a picture of the multitudes from every nation celebrating and worshipping “the one who is seated on the throne” and who ensures that “they will hunger no more, and thirst no more.” (Rev. 7: 15-17)

Clearly, this picture depicts God’s future as one where the multitudes from every nation and tribe will celebrate in “justice and peace [and] where God will wipe away every tear from people’s eyes, and death will be no more.” (Rev. 21:4) For Gonzalez, this striking image is a challenge for twenty first century Christianity and churches to move beyond “proclaiming a Reign of peace, a Reign of justice, a Reign of love” to actually living them out.⁴⁵⁹ Consistent with the multicultural ecclesial vision, God’s invitation to this multicultural future is a gift and opportunity for churches to ensure that “here and now, as there and then, every nation and tribe and people and language be present and represented; that no one be excluded or diminished because of their tribe, or nation, or people, or language.”⁴⁶⁰

⁴⁵⁷ He clearly has no patience with contemporary Christians and churches who ‘pray repeatedly, “Thy Kingdom Come”, and yet behave as if that Reign does not warrant getting prepared for. Gonzalez, For the Healing, p.105.

⁴⁵⁸ Gonzalez, For the Healing, p.106

⁴⁵⁹ Gonzalez, For the Healing, p. 105.

⁴⁶⁰ Gonzalez, For the Healing, p.110.

This chapter was an exploration of the possibility of a multicultural and inclusive church as integral to my search for a place of uncontested belonging. My faith and spiritual formation and growth presupposed an ecclesial reality that is multicultural and inclusive and therefore conducive to uncontested belonging. However, my experiences and observations have exposed a big gap between the biblically and theologically rooted ecclesial multicultural imperative with contemporary ecclesial practice. The potential for ecclesial formations as models for social inclusion has not diminished in my view, for the nature and purpose of Christ's church is uniquely oriented towards such radical inclusiveness.

However, to talk about inclusiveness that is not fully reflected in its own life and witness is dishonest. The multicultural church as a place of uncontested belonging is still an ecclesial vision. It is a vision because it "holds a promise" even if it presents those who purport to be followers of Jesus Christ with challenges and discomfort.⁴⁶¹ The multicultural ecclesial vision is "a matter to be celebrated rather than deplored; an opportunity to be grasped not a problem to be solved," as Dicker argued.⁴⁶² The next two chapters will look at a few churches in different parts of the world who have taken the multicultural vision

⁴⁶¹Dicker in Yoo-Crowe, p.13.

⁴⁶² *ibid.*

seriously as their ecclesial aspirations. We consider how they have developed and grown as multicultural ecclesial communities.

Chapter Three

ECCLESIAL ASPIRATIONS I

A Case Study The United Reformed Church in the UK 2001 – 2007

The multicultural nature of European societies like Britain is no longer in dispute. Multiculturalism, however, as a possible solution for how these societies can live successfully with cultural diversity and difference, is. Many think that multiculturalism has failed. According to Trevor Phillips, Chair of the former Commission for Racial Equality, it is to be blamed for what he sees as Britain “sleepwalking into segregation” and separatism.⁴⁶³ Yasmin Alibhai-Brown suggests that multiculturalism is holding in chains people who otherwise could “embrace cosmopolitanism and Europeanism [and] successfully negotiate local, ethnic, religious and regional identities, and when necessary, transcend them.”⁴⁶⁴

⁴⁶³ CRE has now become the Equality and Human Rights Commission. Trevor Phillips, “Multiculturalism’s Legacy is ‘Have a Nice Day’ Racism”. 28 May 2004 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2004/May/28/equality.raceintheuk>>

⁴⁶⁴ Y. Alibhai-Brown, To Craft a New Society”. *New Internationalist* 5.422 (2009): 8-9.

Both commentators were advocates of multiculturalism in the past. The shift in the socio-political debate in Europe from pro to anti-multiculturalism is attributed by Alibhai-Brown to the failure of multiculturalism to curb the “unwholesome ethnic power-merchants who wanted virtual apartheid” and the inability of “fundamentalist secular liberalism” to take seriously the communal identity and needs of the individual.⁴⁶⁵

In the aftermath of 9/11 and the London and Madrid terrorist bombings, multiculturalism has become the scapegoat for the socio-political ills of many contemporary western societies. Canadian writer Haroon Siddiqui includes the “erosion of common values”, threats to “national security”, and the compromising of freedom of speech in the list of social ills that have been attributed to multiculturalism.⁴⁶⁶ Indeed, detractors have stripped multiculturalism of any value as a solution. They have made it out to be both the problem and the cause of the problem.

It is not the purpose of this chapter to engage in the debate about the usefulness or otherwise of multiculturalism. However, its continuing significance suggests room for further investigation along the subject

⁴⁶⁵ Alibhai-Brown in New Internationalist, p.8.

⁴⁶⁶ H. Siddiqui, “No Room for Bigots” New Internationalist 5.422 (2009): 10-12

and framework of this study and is perhaps best expressed by Siddiqui:

Europeans are abandoning what they never had, if by multiculturalism we mean the official recognition and promotion of the equality and dignity of all groups and cultures, rather than a feel-good policy which celebrates urban cosmopolitanism exotica but camouflages the domination of majority *mores* on minorities – politically, economically, culturally and socially.⁴⁶⁷

As societies grew ever more diverse, the question of how to live with diversity and difference remains significant. The changes and trends taking place in society are also reflected in the church. The United Reformed Church (URC) is no exception. As was expressed by its Assembly Ecumenical Relations Committee:

The United Reformed Church is itself changing, due, for example, to the grouping of churches [and] its increasingly multi-cultural nature in the urban areas. Such developments raise questions about our understanding of the nature of the Church, where authority lies, and the nature of ministry.⁴⁶⁸

This chapter traces the historical changes and developments in the URC's work on racial-ethnic diversity from 2001 to 2007, and some of their impacts on its perceived identity as a Christian community of faith, striving to live and witness as an expression of the body of Christ in the world. During this period many changes took place in key areas in the life of the URC. Some of these changes were very

⁴⁶⁷ Siddiqui, New Internationalist, pp.10-12

⁴⁶⁸ United Reformed Church, Assembly Annual Reports, (London: URC, 2001) paragraph 1.3.2.

significant and had far reaching impacts for the whole Church.⁴⁶⁹ Indeed, some of the changes were themselves signals of more changes to come.⁴⁷⁰ All these were to influence the way racial-ethnic diversity work evolved and took shape in the denomination.

As the URC slowly moved towards becoming a multicultural church, several queries needed response including the significance and impact of policy changes to the multicultural realities in the Church and society; the real versus the symbolic significance of such changes; and their implication for becoming a truly multicultural church. Moreover, there is interest in the role an emerging multicultural ministry plays in the events of this particular period and the practical impact, if any, it made on the ground.

Clearly, to address these issues we need to revisit what we mean by multicultural church and ministry, and how these terms are utilized in this chapter and in the study as a whole.

⁴⁶⁹ The Assembly Debate on Human Sexuality which had been on the Assembly agenda for several years continue to put much strain on the denomination in spite of the previous Assembly's decision to put a *moratorium* on it.

⁴⁷⁰ The Budget for 2002 Report signaled hard times ahead and was the beginning of movement in the denomination to seriously reflect on what changes it will need to make in the near future. URC, Assembly Annual Reports, (London: URC, 2002), p.52.

Multicultural Church

As already mentioned in the Introduction, Robert Schreiter defines a multicultural church simply as “many cultures together in one church.”⁴⁷¹ Church, in this instance, refers to both the denominational setting and the local congregation.⁴⁷² Schreiter goes on to discuss the various ways in which a church with diverse cultural members can be proactive in order to become a truly multicultural church. For a church to be multicultural, it is not enough that the membership is diverse. It also means that the way the church lives and practices its faith must reflect its multicultural membership in just and meaningful ways. He suggests that a multicultural church is not just about “reducing tension and friction among groups,” though that is important too.⁴⁷³ A truly multicultural church, according to Schreiter, is characterized by “recognition of the *other*, respect for cultural difference, and healthy interaction between cultures.”⁴⁷⁴

A multicultural church then is a place where the existence of the *other*, of cultural difference, is recognized as a matter of fact. It is where cultural difference is respected as a normal and a “permanent feature of reality.”⁴⁷⁵ It is where interaction between groups is a regular

⁴⁷¹ Robert Schreiter, “Ministry for a Multicultural Church” 2008
<<http://www.sedos.org/english/schreiter.htm>> (21 May 2008).

⁴⁷² Capital ‘C’ is used in the study for the institutional/denominational form and when referring to the *Church Catholic* but lowercase ‘c’ is used for local church/congregation.

⁴⁷³ Schreiter, <<http://www.sedos.org/english/schreiter.htm>> (21 May 2008)

⁴⁷⁴ Schreiter, <<http://www.sedos.org/english/schreiter.htm>> (21 May 2008)

⁴⁷⁵ Schreiter, <<http://www.sedos.org/english/schreiter.htm>> (21 May 2008)

feature of life, and is healthy in the sense that it is not infected by racism and racial prejudice. Schreiter affirms the importance of policy changes to the achievement of the multicultural church goal. So a multicultural church must be lived and practiced at all areas in the life of the church including its policies, processes, and procedures.

Schreiter's notion of a multicultural church is consistent with the URC's understanding which was adopted by its 2005 General Assembly:

A Multicultural Church: -

- knows that the human family is one 'race', consisting of people of different ethnicity and cultures;
- rejoices in the diverse gifts of the human family;
- welcomes all people regardless of colour, ethnicity, language or culture;
- rejects the sin of racism which prevents authentic engagement with the diverse cultures within the community, and allows hatred and prejudice to thrive;
- uses multicultural inclusiveness as a key organising principle for its life;
- challenges institutional racism at all levels of church and society;
- welcomes the diverse spirituality of all in its liturgy, worship and learning;

- shares its gifts, premises, and resources with brothers and sisters who need a place to gather and worship God;
- develops cross-cultural relations amongst its members with respect and sensitivity;
- works for justice for all of creation.⁴⁷⁶

In short, a multicultural church is one “where unity in Christ is affirmed whilst at the same time the distinctiveness of each culture is valued.”⁴⁷⁷ It is a unity without uniformity; the “harmonious sharing of life with people from diverse cultural traditions in one church.”⁴⁷⁸ Key elements of a multicultural church that are emphasized include the value and respect accorded to the distinctiveness of each group and their unity or oneness in Christ alone.

These two points ring familiar tones in relation to the understanding of multiculturalism being debated in the wider society. In that context, the distinctiveness of each cultural group is meant to be valued and respected. Unity or oneness is expressed in terms of a common culture or values, and in Britain some have referred to this as *Britishness* though what constitutes *Britishness* is still unclear.⁴⁷⁹ It is clear from the Parekh Report that a British national identity is

⁴⁷⁶ URC, Assembly Annual Reports, (London: URC, 2005) Appendix 4.

⁴⁷⁷ URC Racial Justice & Multicultural Ministry, Minutes, (Nov 2006) para. 1.6.

⁴⁷⁸ RJMM, Minutes, (Nov 06) para. 1.8.

⁴⁷⁹ Ratcliffe notes the concern of some that “hyphenated identities such as Asian-British or Black-British have still not become sedimented in the national psyche.” Ratcliffe, ‘Race’, Ethnicity and Difference, p.48.

perceived in many different ways by many different Britons. So to settle on a cohesive notion of Britishness is quite a challenge for in the words of the Report: "Everyone is still staring out of the same window and seeing entirely different views."⁴⁸⁰

In church circles, there is not the same kind of controversy over what constitutes the Christ to whom Christians belong as one. As Paul asserts in his first letter to the Corinthian church, Christ has "broken down the dividing wall" and is intent on creating "in himself one new humanity" reconciled to each other and to God in one body. (Eph.2: 14-16) Could there be a more decisive biblical and theological imperative for the multicultural church? God's gift in creation gives humanity cultural distinctiveness and uniqueness, and precisely because we are all so uniquely different that followers of Christ are called to form multicultural ecclesial communities that manifest, reflect, and confess the new humanity in Christ. That is, to be Christ's body in the world, Christians are called to be barrier breakers, and to be intentional as people who gather to form multicultural inclusive communities that live Christ's way of unity in diversity.

The story of the URC as it wrestled with racial-ethnic diversity and the implications of that reality for its mission and ministry reflect an evolving understanding of what it means to be a multicultural church.

⁴⁸⁰ Runnymede Trust, Parekh Report, p.23.

Though a definition of a multicultural church was not formally articulated in the URC during the early part of the period covered by this chapter, the record will show that the 2005 Assembly statement above is consistent with the understanding that informed and shaped the changes that took place throughout that period.

Multicultural Ministry

Multicultural Ministry is most commonly known today as “ministry with people of many different cultures and traditions in one church or denomination.”⁴⁸¹ The same ministry is also known in different contexts as *cross-cultural*, *inter-cultural*, and multiracial or multi-ethnic as in the American context.⁴⁸² In the URC, there was debate over the use of multiracial and/or multicultural ministry in reference to work with diverse cultures – as we will soon see.

Multicultural ministry was first brought to the attention of the world ecumenical movement during the World Council of Churches Conference for World Mission and Evangelism in Brazil, 1996. A motion was brought by a delegation from the Uniting Church in Australia (UCA) to that conference, asking WCC to take seriously the growing

⁴⁸¹ S, Yoo-Crowe, “Putting Multicultural Ministry on the Agenda”, in Richmond & Yang (eds), Crossing Borders, (Sydney: UCA, 2006), p25.

⁴⁸² The UCA uses multicultural and cross-cultural interchangeably to refer to the same ministry and practice and the United Church of Canada uses inter-cultural ministry to refer to the same ministry.

cultural diversity in the churches around the world by supporting multicultural ministry and those who are already engaged in that ministry.⁴⁸³

Although the WCC did not actually take on board the motion until two years later at its Assembly in Harare, Zimbabwe, that motion succeeded in putting multicultural ministry on the world ecumenical agenda, and led to its adoption and usage by many other churches around the world. Certainly, WCC's initial response to the motion was less than satisfactory though unsurprising since it simply reflected the lack of priority given at the time to multicultural ministry and church by most western mainline denominations. To be sure, the practice of multicultural ministry varies from Church to Church in its scope, influence, resource base, and capacity to make changes. These tend to depend on the level of importance a denomination gives to issues of cultural diversity and on its commitment to becoming a multicultural church.

In the case of the URC, by the beginning of the new century the multicultural language had already begun to appear in certain circles and discussions. However, as the record shows it took a few more years for the concepts of multicultural ministry and church to be

⁴⁸³ I was part of that UCA delegation to Brazil 1996. Yoo-Crowe in Richmond & Yang, Crossing Borders, p.26.

utilized officially in Assembly forums and to appear in official documents. In the period covered by this chapter, multicultural ministry in the URC was only just emerging out of what was known as multiracial ministry. Multicultural ministry was to become the instrument of hope “for the realisation of the multicultural community of God on earth.”⁴⁸⁴

The distinction between multiracial and multicultural is not clear cut. The terms are often used interchangeably. Some people see multiracial as putting emphasis on the more confronting issue of racism, while others see multicultural as more inclusive of other forms of exclusion and discrimination including ability, age, class, gender, and sexuality. Obviously there is no denying the prevailing tension between the two approaches.

Scholars like David Goldberg attribute this tension to a form of modern and postmodern western liberal “meliorism” that pretends away racist culture as something of the past whilst simultaneously creating a new more sophisticated and subtle form of racism under the label multicultural diversity.⁴⁸⁵ Goldberg sees cultural diversity and multiculturalism under this liberal construction as no more than administrative tools for the subtle manipulation and managing of racial

⁴⁸⁴ URC, Assembly Annual Reports, (London: URC, 2005), Appendix 4.

⁴⁸⁵ Goldberg, Racist Culture, p.8.

exclusions.⁴⁸⁶ In short, as tools for maintaining the status quo of racial disparities and imbalances of power in the body politic.

This critique resonates with detractors of multiculturalism like Alibhai-Brown and Phillips discussed earlier. It also helps explain the misgivings expressed by some multicultural ministry practitioners and racial justice activists to the shift from multiracial to multicultural ministry in the URC. We return to this discussion later in the chapter but for now we note Modood's distinction between "colour racism" and "cultural racism" as an accessible way to understand the debate and misgivings expressed in relation to the multiracial and multicultural approaches.⁴⁸⁷ The Parekh Report refers to colour racism as "biological racism" since it uses phenotype as a marker of difference.⁴⁸⁸ Cultural racism, on the other hand, appeals to cultural factors like language, cuisine, and dress as markers of difference and therefore as basis for exclusion.

At this point it needs reiterating that the study is advocating and promoting multicultural ministry as an ecclesial program and practice that takes seriously the need to challenge and address both forms of racism. As we will see, this is the same understanding assumed by the URC as it strives to be a multicultural church.

⁴⁸⁶ Goldberg, Racist Culture, p.220.

⁴⁸⁷ Modood, Multicultural Politics, p.7.

⁴⁸⁸ Runnymede, Parekh Report, p.60.

The URC's Racial Justice Ministry

(i) The Ministry

The United Reformed Church in the UK is a predominantly white middle class church. From its formation in 1972, a few minority ethnic people were a feature of the church on the ground. Most of the minority ethnic folks in the URC in the early days were from Caribbean backgrounds, especially Jamaica, Guyana, Barbados, and Trinidad.⁴⁸⁹ Most lived around the London areas. A few West Africans, especially from Ghana, also joined the URC.⁴⁹⁰ Their number had steadily increased over the years so that by 2001 Ghanaians made up the biggest minority ethnic group in the URC. Several have formed Ghanaian mono-cultural URC congregations and others had joined URC multicultural congregations.⁴⁹¹

This growing racial-ethnic diversity was certainly making an impact on the ground, but at a cost. Their experiences of finding a spiritual home were mostly painful, ranging from overt racist rejection to more subtle ones, like being told that surely the black church down the road would

⁴⁸⁹ K. Tahaafe-Williams et al, Mission and Ministry in Multicultural Contexts, (London: CWM, 2009), p.32.

⁴⁹⁰ K. Tahaafe-Williams & S. Ackroyd, Multicultural Ministry Toolkit, (London: URC, 2005) Appendix 3, p. 28.

⁴⁹¹ Mono-cultural is used interchangeably with mono-ethnic and refers to culturally specific churches where the members are of the same ethnic background.

be better to join.⁴⁹² By the early 21st century almost 50% of churches of the Thames North Synod of the URC, which covers a huge part of London, were multicultural to a greater or lesser extent.⁴⁹³ And throughout the URC churches in England, Wales and Scotland, especially in urban areas, the number of people from minority ethnic backgrounds was steadily rising.

For some of these folks, men and women, lay and ordained, their painful experiences on the ground only served to push them into anti-racism activist mode. Their experiences of racism at the grassroots led them to conclude that they needed help and support from the institutional church, to educate people in local churches about the issues, and to develop and promote racial justice and equality around the whole church. Several joined forces and pooled their energy and resources with white anti-racism activists in the London district councils of the URC.

These folks worked hard to push the URC to recognize the need for racial justice in the church. It was their effort in the Thames North synod, the most racial-ethnically diverse synod of the URC that led to

⁴⁹² Mukhti Barton details many such stories of rejection in her book. See M. Barton, Rejection, Resistance and Resurrection: Speaking out on racism in the church, (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2005).

⁴⁹³ Tahaafe-Williams & Ackroyd, Multicultural Ministry, p.32.

that synod bringing a motion to General Assembly in 1994 asking for the creation of a special multi-racial ministry.⁴⁹⁴

The debate over the motion at General Assembly was robust. As there were hardly any Assembly members from minority ethnic backgrounds at the time, the white members of Assembly who were active in anti-racism activities or who were sympathetic to the cause had to do most of the speaking for the motion. The few minorities that were present were not members of Assembly and did not have a vote. So, all the minority ethnic folks on the ground were completely dependant on white members of the Assembly for the fruition of their effort.

This issue of minority dependency on the majority in itself highlights a key rationale for the multicultural church and ministry. For a truly multicultural church ensures that minority voices are empowered to be heard mindful that majoritarianism can be a powerful tool of exclusion and injustice.⁴⁹⁵ A truly multicultural church is alert to the ways institutional and institutionalized racism operates and can recognize that minority dependency, unregulated majoritarianism, and tokenism are clear signs that such forms of racism are thriving.

⁴⁹⁴URC, Assembly Annual Report (London: URC,1994) Resolution 20b) para 7.3.

⁴⁹⁵ Political majoritarianism allow majority interests not only to dictate and shape the political process but it also continually reproduces its own dominance, politically, socially and culturally. See Mills in Doane & Bonilla-Silva, White Out, pp.36, 43.

A most debilitating impact of institutionalized racism is its capacity to strip a minority ethnic person of the ability to be a change agent for their own liberation. Even when such a person manages to overcome all odds to break down barriers on the ground, where it counts in terms of greater socio-political impact and change, dependency on white dominant individual and collective power is a given. Moreover, the narrative is (mis)appropriated at that point so that the minority ethnic effort fades into the background and the narrative is all about the white saviour's courage, compassion for the downtrodden, and heroism.

A great example of this is the recent showing of the movie on Wilberforce which tells the story of the abolition of the slave trade in Britain. There is no denying that Wilberforce had become the hero and the face of the abolition of the slave trade for millions around the world. But the heroic efforts of Olaudah Equiano, is hardly known.⁴⁹⁶ He was the former enslaved African, who, having overcome the greatest odds to gain his freedom, spent his whole life fighting unimaginable odds to try and outlaw the slave trade and slavery itself. But he had to depend on white people like Wilberforce to speak on his behalf since in the socio-political corridors of power he was not recognized because he was black.

⁴⁹⁶ Tahaafe-Williams et al, We Belong, p.18.

The support and active involvement of white allies are absolutely critical and in fact necessary, but care must always be exercised to avoid hijacking the self-liberatory effort of the victims of racism themselves. Moreover, when the victim's story is appropriated by the powerful the impact on the victim is continuing disempowerment and diminished capacity for independence and self-determination.

It was a similar kind of experience in the lead up to the Assembly debate to establish a multiracial ministry. The minority ethnic people on the ground whose effort brought the issue to wider attention in the first place were pretty much faceless. As already mentioned they had no vote and had to depend on their white supporters and voters. The debate in the end came down to the question of resources. And nothing could have guaranteed failure more, since the easiest way to mask systemic institutionalized racism is to point the finger at the lack of money and resources.

However, the creative thinking of the then General Secretary of the Council for World Mission (CWM), Rev Dr Preman Niles, saved the motion.⁴⁹⁷ He suggested that the URC could use one of its five special ministry posts funded by CWM to begin this work. These special posts

⁴⁹⁷ The Council for World Mission (CWM) is a Global Mission organization with member churches from around the world. It originally was known as the London Missionary Society. The URC is a member church of the CWM.

were used for fostering closer relationships with overseas partner churches and to assist in raising multicultural awareness at home.

The URC agreed and in 1996 created a three year post called Multiracial-Multicultural Development Worker and appointed a minister from its partner church in Jamaica to come and investigate the validity of the claim that the church needed a special multiracial ministry. Rev Marjorie Lewis-Cooper did her research in three years, made her recommendations then returned to Jamaica.⁴⁹⁸ Her recommendations helped the Assembly in 2000 to agree to create an Assembly Multiracial Ministry as recorded in the Assembly Book of Reports:

In light of the initial expectations and on the basis of the work being done, the Management Committee was unanimous, and Mission Council agreed, that the United Reformed Church continue with a major programme around racial justice.⁴⁹⁹

In 2001 the Assembly Racial Justice Secretary was appointed.

The year 2001 marked a critical point in the work to address issues of racial-ethnic diversity in the life of the United Reformed Church in the UK. That year saw the inauguration of the first Assembly programme for racial justice. The use of "racial justice" reflected the current language being used within the religious communities and in the wider

⁴⁹⁸ Details of her report are included in the URC, Assembly Annual Reports, (London: URC, 2000), Appendix 9.

⁴⁹⁹ URC, Assembly Annual Report, (London: URC, 2000), Appendix 9.

British society at the time.⁵⁰⁰ From the 70's to the late 90's, URC work on issues of racial-ethnic diversity and difference appeared to have been picked up by various committees of the Assembly including Equal Opportunities, Inter Faith Relations, Church and Society, and Ecumenical Relations.

The denomination could not have been immune to the controversies surrounding incidents of racial discrimination and violence in the wider British society during these early years. In addition, its own membership at the grassroots was steadily growing more ethnically diverse. Yet at the institutional level, there seemed to be confusion and uncertainty about where the responsibility for such work belonged. The record suggests that in those early periods the Assembly made the decision to place responsibility for work on issues of racial diversity with the Assembly Committee for Church and Society which was set up to:

Serve local churches, district councils and synods, ecumenical and appropriate secular bodies, in raising awareness, sharing information and encouraging reflection and action on matters of justice and peace, healing and reconciliation. It seeks to represent the concern of the church for such matters to government and others with power over the life of people in these islands, acting ecumenically wherever possible.⁵⁰¹

⁵⁰⁰ For example government bodies like the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) and ecumenical bodies like Churches Commission for Racial Justice (CCRJ) – a commission of the Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) – on which I served as a commissioner for many years.

⁵⁰¹ URC, Assembly Annual Reports, (London: URC, 2001), p44.

This move was replicated on the ground where racial-ethnic issues were the responsibility of church and society groups in the synods and/or district councils.⁵⁰² It was felt that since this committee's brief was about justice and peace in church and society, it was the appropriate platform from which racial justice concerns could be addressed. But anyone who has read an Assembly Book of Reports will know that this committee had a huge and demanding brief. And the same can be said of the synod and district council groups.

Nevertheless, that is where the racial justice work was placed and it was to the credit of certain key members of that committee that some of its very busy time was focused on issues of 'race' and racism. Active on that committee were key persons on the racial justice networks who also represented the URC in ecumenical bodies like the Churches Commission for Racial Justice (CCRJ).⁵⁰³

The adoption of an Equal Opportunities Policy by General Assembly in 1994 also was significant for highlighting issues of racial discrimination. The Ecumenical Committee often had to deal with issues of new migrant churches because of its responsibilities to overseas partners. That brought issues of 'race' and multiculturalism

⁵⁰² To their credit these church and society groups were by and large conscientious and faithful and took their responsibilities very seriously so that when I assumed my role as Secretary for Racial Justice and visited the synods and district councils, I became very aware of their critical role in keeping the issue of racial justice alive on the denomination's mission agenda.

⁵⁰³ Racial justice activists like Sandra Ackroyd, a founding member of the racial justice movement in the URC.

within its purview too. The Inter Faith Relations Committee often had issues to deal with that overlapped with racial-ethnic concerns. These inter-committee involvements suggested a widespread concern over racial-ethnic issues within the denomination. They were indications of the need to have a focused racial justice ministry, rather than having some bits handled here and some parts treated elsewhere. However, it was also clear that the URC was not yet prepared to recognize racial-ethnic diversity as a ministry in its own right. That is, until the motion from Thames North Synod in the early 90's instigated by black and white activists at the grassroots.

Although the events leading up to the decision of the General Assembly in 2000 finally to create an Assembly Racial Justice Ministry did not go without debates and tension, by that point six years had passed since the issue was put on the agenda, the denomination was continuing to grow more racial-ethnically diverse, and the 1993 racist murder of Stephen Lawrence added to the feeling of determination to act.⁵⁰⁴

In July 2001, the URC General Assembly not only inducted its first Assembly Secretary for Racial Justice, it also put in place a process to

⁵⁰⁴ Macpherson Report 1999

form its first Assembly Standing Committee for Racial Justice.⁵⁰⁵ The creation of an Assembly Racial Justice Ministry had both critical symbolic and material significance in the life of the URC, which were communicated to me when I commenced my post in early 2001:⁵⁰⁶

- a) It was symbolically significant, in the sense that it gave the message to the whole Church, its ecumenical partners, and the wider society that racial justice was integral to its theological and mission agenda, and was of equal status to any of its ministries. This was critical to helping the denomination respond to concerns of tokenism in how it had dealt with the issues thus far, and to those serving in the particular ministry to challenge perceptions of racial justice as a *special interest* project rather than as a critical and central part of the URC's mission priorities;
- b) It meant that the issue of racial-ethnic diversity had now become an Assembly ministry and thus a part of the denomination's institutional structure, giving racial justice work due respect, as well as the denominational resources and support needed to consolidate the work done thus far. This was seen as giving the racial justice programme a semi-guarantee for long term survival at a time when the URC itself, and most historical mainline churches in Britain, were declining in membership, and resources for church mission and ministries

⁵⁰⁵ My induction was held at the URC General Assembly in York with the Rev Dr Elizabeth Welch as the Assembly Moderator presiding.

⁵⁰⁶ From my notes as Secretary for Racial Justice taken at the time.

were diminishing. Under such circumstances, the question of programme survival is always an issue, and indeed, it was felt to be a bold move on the part of the URC to add another significant ministry to its work.⁵⁰⁷

The process that led up to the formation of the Assembly Racial Justice committee and the appointment of the Secretary are outlined in detail below as they highlight important stages in the denomination's evolving concern on issues of racial-ethnic and cultural diversity.

The work of the URC General Assembly is done through councils and committees. The Mission Council is a singularly important council for the denomination as it carries out work and acts on behalf of General Assembly in-between annual Assemblies. The Council meets residentially at least three times a year and it is a representative body of all thirteen synods of the URC. Its purpose is:

To enable the Church, in its General Assembly, to take a more comprehensive view of its activities and policies, to decide more carefully about priorities, and to encourage its outreach to the community.⁵⁰⁸

So, implementing the Assembly decision to establish an Assembly Racial Justice Programme was the responsibility of Mission Council.

⁵⁰⁷ Mission and Ministry Fund in Budget for 2002, Assembly Annual Reports 2002 emphasized the diminishing resources of the Church due largely to declining membership so predictions for available resources for the ongoing work of the church were not promising.

⁵⁰⁸ URC, Assembly Annual Reports, (London: URC, 2001), p.24.

(ii) The Staff / Secretary

In response to the decision of Assembly 2000 to “urge Mission Council as a matter of high priority to secure funding and urgently to make an appropriate appointment” to continue the work on racial-ethnic diversity, Mission Council proceeded to set up the post as a matter of urgency.⁵⁰⁹ The process of selection and appointment was reported thus:

A job description was agreed and an appointment group named. Because of the timing of meetings, it was agreed that the officers of General Assembly could make the appointment if the selection group came up with a clear recommendation. Mrs Katalina Tahaafe-Williams was appointed as Secretary for Racial Justice and has taken up her duties. She will be inducted at Assembly.⁵¹⁰

In that same year the Assembly Committee for Inter-Faith Relations was going through its fifth year review. Established in 1996 as an Assembly Committee but without an Assembly Secretary, the review group recommended to Mission Council that the Committee should continue its work for another five years.⁵¹¹ The Inter Faith Relations Committee was set up to:

Encourage and assist the churches in inter-faith situations; affirm and support individuals involved in inter-faith dialogue on behalf of the church; engage in direct contact and dialogue with people of other faiths; develop theological understanding of

⁵⁰⁹ URC, *Assembly Annual Reports*, (London: URC, 2000), Resolution 49.

⁵¹⁰ URC, *Assembly Annual Reports*, (London: URC, 2001), p.25.

⁵¹¹ Often the Assembly would see the validity of carrying out Assembly work in particular areas or on particular issues but for various reasons, key of which is lack of resources, it would set up an Assembly Committee for such work but without a staff person. The Assembly Equal Opportunities Committee is one such committee. URC, *Assembly Annual Reports*, (London: URC, 2001), Resolution 7, p.28.

inter-faith dialogue and mission; keep abreast with what is happening in the teaching about other faiths in schools and colleges⁵¹²

While the Committee did not have its own staff Secretary, it did have appointed to it a *Staff Link* person who, at the time of the review, was the Assembly Secretary for International Relations. The rationale for such a staff link as expressed in its title was to provide a link between the Committee and its work with the rest of the work of the Assembly. In reality, for all intents and purposes, the staff link person performed the responsibilities of an Assembly Executive Secretary for Inter Faith Relations, as far as their *normal* responsibilities would allow.

As an outcome of the review, Mission Council made the decision to replace the Secretary for International Relations as Staff Link for the Inter Faith Committee, and added that role to the job description of the soon to be appointed Secretary for Racial Justice. Mission Council accepted the recommendations of the review.⁵¹³ This development was to have a significant impact on the racial justice work.

On the surface it would seem that the new post of Assembly Executive Secretary for Racial Justice was given an almost impossible brief. There were concerns from certain individuals and sections of the Church that such a huge brief was a strategy for failure.

⁵¹² Assembly Annual Reports, 2001, p.66.

⁵¹³ Assembly Annual Reports 2001, p28.

Understandably, there were concerns that already the amount of work to be done in the area of racial justice which the new secretary needed to address was huge. To add inter faith relations, though equally significant for church and society, to an already overwhelming brief which could mean a reduction of secretary time dedicated to racial justice ministry, was felt to risk the effectiveness of work that urgently needed to be done. It was seen as a recipe for failure, and already there were some voices of discontent around certain places in the Church, bemoaning the fact that an Assembly racial justice post had been created at all. There was concern that any signs of ineffectiveness would not only unduly and unfairly reflect back on the staff person who was overburdened to begin with, but may also add some justification to these voices of discontent.

However, others asserted that it was logical to bring the work of racial justice and inter faith relations together in this way. This view is supported by the Parekh Report which included in its recommendations the need for faith communities to foster closer "connections between anti-racism and work to improve inter-faith relations."⁵¹⁴ Several of the issues engaging the Racial Justice Committee were also the concerns of the Inter Faith Relations Committee. For example, the Inter Faith Committee was working with refugee and asylum seekers and was urging churches to support them

⁵¹⁴ Runnymede Trust, Parekh Report, p.311.

as people who were “finding themselves in an alien and strange world needing our care and support and would especially appreciate our understanding of their culture and faith.”⁵¹⁵ Further, it was involved in working to combat racism and religious discrimination, notably in urging the whole Church to observe Holocaust Memorial Day on January 27 every year as “a Day that also promotes the need to build a society free from the evils of genocide, racism, antisemitism and other forms of discrimination.”⁵¹⁶ Lastly, many members of the Racial Justice Advocacy (RJA) network were also already actively engaged in inter faith relations work and dialogue in their local communities.⁵¹⁷

From the perspectives of the two committees, the preferred solution was for the Assembly to agree to appoint a Secretary for Inter Faith Relations. The record suggests that resource issues, given the prevailing financial climate, made this unlikely, and as mentioned above, in fact the two areas of work had several concerns in common. The decision to add inter faith work to the brief of the Racial Justice Secretary did force the two committees to work more closely together. At the time members of both committees stated that this was strategically important after all for the reasons that the Assembly requires its committees to work as cooperatively and collaboratively as possible; the best approach to further the work was by fostering allies

⁵¹⁵ Assembly Annual Reports 2001, para 4.2 p.66.

⁵¹⁶ Assembly Annual Reports 2001, Resln 25, p67.

⁵¹⁷ This important network (RJA) for the work of racial justice was at this point still a loosely formed network but was soon to be reorganized, coordinated and formally recognized by the Assembly.

to share resources, good practice ideas, and to give support and solidarity; and, the two areas of work were not seen by many within the URC as *traditional* areas of ministry so this could help strengthen their positions and their credibility within the whole denomination.⁵¹⁸

Records of the appointment process for the Racial Justice Secretary suggest that the URC took seriously its equal opportunities policy.⁵¹⁹

For example, the application procedure in the information pack for the post included an *Equal Opportunities Monitoring Form* that applicants were asked to voluntarily complete and submit with their applications.⁵²⁰ This form included requests for information concerning applicant's ethnic background, gender, age, religion, and so on. Also in the information pack were the job description and person specification for the post. The Secretary's job description included the following:

- enabling and encouraging the United Reformed Church in its congregations and councils to be more open and integrated culturally and racially;
- exploring the task of mission in our multicultural society;

⁵¹⁸ That is, traditional front line ministry for example, or theological training, ecumenical relations - these are examples of ministries that were taken for granted as important ministry areas for which church resources are justifiably used.

⁵¹⁹ Assembly Annual Reports 1994, Resolution 7.

⁵²⁰ Notes in possession of Researcher.

- identifying and working on strategies for overcoming racism and towards racial justice in the church and society.⁵²¹

Duties and responsibilities included:

- implementing racial justice programmes to raise awareness throughout the life and work of the United Reformed Church;
- developing and facilitating the empowerment programmes for minority ethnic members of the URC;
- developing the advocacy work across the Church, recruiting, training and supporting advocates for racial justice in each synod;
- developing and maintaining supportive racial justice networks in the URC;
- maintaining close links with other General Assembly Committees and other relevant committees to develop and monitor strategies to promote racial justice;
- promoting the public witness of the URC in the area of racial justice in collaboration with the Church and Society Committee, other groups and individuals in the URC and with ecumenical partners;
- contributing to the development of thinking and policy on racial justice issues within the URC and ecumenically;

⁵²¹ Copies in possession of Researcher.

- acting as Secretary to the (yet to be decided) Racial Justice Committee;
- being the Staff Link working with the Committee for Inter Faith Relations and overseeing its budget;
- ensuring personal compliance and that of support staff with health and safety at work regulations;
- being open to new patterns of work and to new responsibilities should the General Assembly or its appointed committees so decide.⁵²²

The Person Specification for the post included:

- the ability to reflect theologically on racial justice issues and to relate this to the mission of the church,
- the ability to plan and facilitate seminars and workshops on racial justice issues,
- sensitivity to discrimination and disadvantage reflected through personal experience and/or knowledge.⁵²³

The post was full time and initially for five years. In 2001 Mission Council also changed the terms of employment for lay staff from termed to open-ended contract.⁵²⁴ This was to be consistent with current British employment legislation, which still subjected lay staff to

⁵²² Copies in Researcher's possession.

⁵²³ From original documents in the researcher's archive.

⁵²⁴ Assembly Annual Reports 2001, para 3.7, p. 25.

periodical appraisals but they could be in post for as long as they wanted the job – unless of course the Assembly saw fit to end the ministry or cut the particular programme.⁵²⁵ So while racial justice ministry as programme was still vulnerable to the changing fortunes and mindset of the denomination, the appointment of a lay person to the post (while not by deliberate design) did imply secure long term continuation of the racial justice work.

The appointment of a person of minority ethnic background to the post had raised some issues. For several days after I commenced my post, the then Deputy General Secretary and I were engaged in telephone conversations and meetings with certain members of the church who expressed opposing views about the appointment. Some views that were communicated to the Secretary's office suggested that it would have been more prudent to appoint a white person for the following reasons:

- that a white person would have easier access in a white dominated URC;
- that a white person in the post would give a strong message that this was an issue for white people as well as people from minority ethnic backgrounds;

⁵²⁵ In contrast, ordained ministers had termed appointments.

- that a white person may have better access to some of the minority ethnic communities that live in tension with each other due to historical conflicts back in the countries of origin.

Other views that were communicated strongly affirmed the appointment of a person from a minority ethnic background to the post for the following reasons:

- the URC was a white dominated Church where the norms of its thinking, culture, and operations were shaped by its dominant white British culture. Experience and the record suggest that it takes time for anything outside of that white cultural norm to be visible in the Church's life and witness, so that its leadership were all white, its staffing at all levels were predominantly white, to name two examples. It was argued that if the denomination was serious about its commitment to racial justice and the changes it needed to make in order to become a multiracial Church, then it needed urgently to start somewhere, and the appointment of an Assembly Executive Secretary from a background other than white was a good place to start;
- the URC was still in the early stages of its development as a multiracial church, and until such time when it was normative for racial-ethnic diversity to be reflected at all levels of its life and witness, it was felt that this was one area of work where the

expert knowledge and experience of someone from a minority ethnic background was less contestable;

- the work was going to be overwhelming and very challenging and it needed to be driven with conviction, passion, persistence, and tireless commitment. In other words, it was maintained that the staff person needed to be someone for whom the experience of racial exclusion and discrimination was not just an abstract academic exercise but the living experience of one who could both empathise and sympathise with those who needed help the most;
- the time for a member of minority ethnic communities to be in such executive roles in the life of the Church was long overdue, and was urgently needed to give some role model examples for young people and children, and to help gain the trust and faith of minority ethnic adults already wearied by lifelong experiences of exclusion and discrimination both outside and within the Church.⁵²⁶

At the time, a white colleague suggested to me that minority ethnic people who did this kind of work were limiting their own abilities, when they should be able to exercise their gifts in other areas. In response, I reminded him that in the twenty nine years of the URC's existence, all Assembly post holders were white, even though membership was

⁵²⁶ Racial Justice Committee, Minutes, Dec 2001.

growing more racially diverse. This, I pointed out, was not a reflection of unlimited abilities on the part of white folks, nor indeed of limited abilities on the part of minority ethnic folks. Rather, I suggested, it was more likely to do with white folks like him who lacked the imagination and/or inclination to make room for able and gifted minority ethnic folks which seemed to me to have a *limiting* impact on what gifted minority ethnic people like me are able to do.

Further, I told him that my deliberate choice to give my life to this particular kind of work was no reflection on my ability to do *his* job. Nevertheless, although the appointment group did not set out with the expressed intention of appointing a minority ethnic person to the post, it seemed to me critical at the time for the appointment to be of someone who was not white, and that is what they did.

At the time of the appointment, the only other such post at that national level in other mainline British Churches was in the Methodist Church.⁵²⁷ In most other British Churches, including the Church of England, racial-ethnic diversity work was being carried out at more regional and localized areas, for example at parish and diocesan levels, if at all. Gradually, some of these Churches were to create national posts for racial-ethnic diversity work, including the Baptist Union and Salvation Army.

⁵²⁷ The Methodist Church had appointed its Secretary for Racial Justice five years previously.

(iii) The Committee

In addition to the appointment of the Secretary for Racial Justice, Mission Council also acted on behalf of Assembly to establish a new standing Committee for Racial Justice and asked the Nominations Committee to propose names for its officers and members.⁵²⁸ The Nominations Committee then proposed the following names to be on the Racial Justice Standing Committee:

RACIAL JUSTICE

Convener: Revd Raymond Singh [2005]

Secretary: Secretary for Racial Justice

Mr Kofi Akuumani[2005]

Revd Michael Jagessar [2005]

Mr Shaheen Zar [2005]

*Mrs Vanessa Honeyghan [2005]*⁵²⁹

The process for the formation of the Assembly Racial Justice Committee was not without controversy. When the names of the nominees were made known, letters of protest were received at the Secretary's office and by the Deputy General Secretary of the URC. The concerns came from minority ethnic members who objected to the fact that the Assembly Racial Justice Committee consisted of people

⁵²⁸ Assembly Annual Reports 2001 para3.8 p26.

⁵²⁹ Assembly Annual Reports 2001para 2.13 p80.

only from minority ethnic backgrounds, and that there was not a single white person nominated to the committee. The concerns raised in the discussion were communicated in the following terms:

- it was critical that the Committee consisted of a balanced racial-ethnic representation;
- there seemed to be a shortage of people from minority ethnic backgrounds nominated to serve in other church committees and councils, yet for this particular committee that was not an issue.⁵³⁰

It was pointed out that these issues starkly exposed what was seen as a widely held misconception in the denomination, that race and ethnic diversity issues were the concerns only of minority ethnic people and not of all. A nominee of Asian Caribbean background felt so strongly about this issue that he withdrew his name to make room for white nominees to the committee.

As the newly appointed Secretary, my views were consistent with the concerns raised. The Deputy General Secretary and I then proceeded to address these concerns, though officially these steps would not be seen publicly until the Assembly of 2003. This was due to the facts that the timing of the Secretary's induction was not until Assembly July 2001, and because of the controversy over committee membership, the October Mission Council of that year did not have a

⁵³⁰ URC Racial Justice Committee, Minutes, (December 2001).

full Committee for appointment. However, the work of the committee could not be suspended while these issues were being addressed. It was agreed that the Secretary would continue with her responsibilities, and at the same time work closely with the Deputy General Secretary to complete the steps needed to form the Racial Justice Committee.

By Assembly 2002, a new and more balanced Committee was formed, with two new members from white backgrounds.⁵³¹ The Secretary and the new Committee then began work on drafting the committee's formal responsibilities, which were agreed by Mission Council in October 2002 as:

- enabling the United Reformed Church to understand and respond to the multi-racial/multi-cultural nature of society in order to enhance its mission;
- assisting the United Reformed Church to reflect on racial justice issues and to address these in its policies;
- identifying strategies for combating racism in all its forms in the church and society, working closely with other committees and councils of the church to implement them;
- helping the United Reformed Church to celebrate the diverse racial and cultural backgrounds of its membership,

⁵³¹ The Revd Dr John Campbell and the Revd Julie Martin.

encouraging all members to participate meaningfully at all levels of the Church's life.⁵³²

The Committee's brief was formally received and passed by General Assembly in July 2003.

So it took three years from the time of the creation of the ministry in 2000 for the Secretary and the Committee to be fully set up to do the work. For the folks on the ground who pushed the motion in the first place, they had waited almost a decade to really begin to see any practical results for their proactive effort.

(iv) Programme Priorities

As the Secretary, I had to set priorities without a committee when I commenced my post in early 2001. I was keenly aware of the urgent need to develop empowerment programmes to support minority ethnic folks at the grassroots; lay and ordained, men and women, young and old, who for years have struggled with racism in all its forms. I was aware too of the many white folks, some of them Assembly colleagues, who were opposed to the idea of a Racial Justice Ministry and who felt offended by what they perceived as political correctness gone haywire. Others felt offended because it was perceived as minorities getting special attention while working class poor whites

⁵³² Assembly Annual Reports 2003, pp.92-93.

were being left out.⁵³³ In fact, the Parekh Report discusses the notion of “street racism” referring to racist acts by white people in Britain who are “economically disadvantaged and politically disempowered in relation to the wider society.”⁵³⁴ The point being made is that material inequalities exist “both between communities and within them.”⁵³⁵ And as Ratcliffe points out this makes some even more vulnerable to racial prejudice and hate.⁵³⁶

Dence et al highlight many examples in Tower Hamlets where government housing allocations (1991-2001) were evidently favouring new Bangladeshi arrivals over native residents.⁵³⁷ Understandably, this had made many white residents angry and some of that anger was directed at Bangladeshi folks. However, the study by Dence et al also show that many whites were experiencing very good relations with their Bangladeshi neighbours and they mostly blamed government policies and procedures for such problems.⁵³⁸ On this issue, the Parekh Report is clear that *street racism* thrives where economic inequality exists within the white population and such social exclusion within white communities needs to be urgently, consistently, and systematically addressed if street racism is to decline.⁵³⁹ As

⁵³³ This was a recurring objection as I made my way around the country raising awareness and promoting racial justice and equality.

⁵³⁴ Runnymede, Parekh Report, p.77.

⁵³⁵ *ibid.*

⁵³⁶ Ratcliffe, ‘Race’, Ethnicity and Difference, p.162.

⁵³⁷ Dence et al, The New East End, p.160.

⁵³⁸ *ibid.*

⁵³⁹ Runnymede, Parekh Report, p.78.

Ratcliffe asserts, such inequalities must be addressed but they are not to detract from the urgent focus racism demands.⁵⁴⁰

As I began to initiate some multicultural ministry priorities in the URC, I found that some black folks felt they were doing just fine without help. They expressed a strong desire not to rock the boat in their local churches where they have been for decades and where being habitually patronized had numbed any sense of offensiveness.

Many white people dismissed the need for multicultural ministry on the basis of relevance (or rather irrelevance in this case), claiming that since they had no minority ethnic people in their neighbourhoods 'race' and racism were not an issue for them. Others felt that since they supported the creation of the post, and a person has now been appointed, their job was done and they could finally relax and let the person get on with it. Others saw the staff appointment as tokenism and so felt offended on my behalf. Others patronized me with sweet tolerance!

It needs pointing out that recounting these developments and narratives are not simply some historical recording exercise. They highlight the many current issues of 'race' and multiculturalism that a church needs to be aware of and to wrestle with as it strives to be a

⁵⁴⁰ Ratcliffe, 'Race', Ethnicity and Difference, p.162.

multicultural church. Many of the issues raised are very familiar and have been dealt with elsewhere in the study. As a key protagonist in this story, I knew all the arguments and all the excuses that arise out of such racial and multicultural debate and discourse. I had no illusions about what I was putting myself through. I expected it to be an uphill struggle. I also knew that I had the support and unwavering belief of the minority ethnic URC leaders and networks which was critical. I received phone calls and emails from them, and several visited me in the office to let me know of their support.

Turning my mind to the ministry, I decided that minority ethnic empowerment, racism awareness training and education, and mainstreaming the scope and reach of multicultural ministry in the URC were three programme priorities that needed immediate attention. While I was focused on developing and implementing these priorities Mission Council again saw fit to expand the Racial Justice Secretary's job description.⁵⁴¹

At the time the then Ecumenical Secretary retired, and her work involving new migrant groups and churches, and the Mission Partners Programme were not to be part of her successor's job description. The Mission Partners Programme involved bringing five people from partner churches overseas to work in special ministry posts within the

⁵⁴¹ Assembly Annual Reports 2003 p70.

URC for a set period of time. Responsibilities for the staff person included relating to the partner church, finding placement for the mission partner in Britain, and providing the mission partner and his/her family with support and pastoral care. It was felt that this Programme properly fitted into the Racial Justice Secretary's work remit "recognising that the receiving mission partner posts are substantially connected to the ongoing development of multi-cultural ministry and learning in the life of the United Reformed Church."⁵⁴²

This new addition to the Secretary's work brief highlighted the fact that the numbers of new migrant churches were on the increase and that relating to these groups, especially as many of them were using URC church properties without any formal links to the denomination, was important. As Secretary for Racial Justice I was already working with a number of these groups in different parts of the country either to facilitate negotiations about property sharing, or to help integrate them as congregations of the URC. For me this was an important part of growing the multicultural URC.

In addition, I had organized a 2003 URC Consultation on Multicultural Ministry in Windermere, where white and minority ethnic participants from URC churches all around the UK expressed a strong consensus that the URC needed to make multicultural ministry a priority for its

⁵⁴² Assembly Annual Reports 2003 p.70.

work in the way sister churches around the world were doing. For example, in the Presbyterian Church USA, the Uniting Church in Australia, and United Church in Canada to name a few.

The main contentious issue at the consultation was to do with the relationship and distinction between multi-racial ministry and multicultural ministry. As discussed earlier in the chapter, some favoured multicultural ministry because for them it implied a more inclusive and holistic approach to diversity so it can be used as a tool for wider inclusiveness in the church. That is, to address other forms of discrimination as well, and not just racial-ethnic. It was suggested that this would gain more grounds in the whole church especially in areas where white people were not receptive to issues of 'race'. This was exactly the fear of those who held reservations about multicultural ministry. They worried that here was another veiled attempt to dilute the issues of 'race' and racism to make it more palatable for members of the white dominant culture.

This was a legitimate concern and needed to be taken seriously. Basically, the fear was that an emphasis on multicultural ministry meant a focus on *cultural racism* which implied a neglect of *colour/biological racism*. My own input was to articulate an understanding and practice of multicultural ministry shared by

multicultural practitioners in other denominations and ecumenical partners around the world that multicultural ministry was not a means of diluting or glossing over racism and the need for racial justice in the church. I emphasised a notion of a truly multicultural church as one that is racially just. I was clear that multicultural ministry in my practice and experience is an effective tool for combating racism. My intention was to dispel the widespread misconception that multicultural ministry was an easy option to avoid having to deal with the hard issues of 'race' and racism. Such a notion was utterly inconsistent with my definition of multicultural church and ministry.

In my experience there can be no truly multicultural church without racial justice and equality, whereas some piecemeal forms of racial justice can be achieved in certain areas in the life of a church that was not interested in being multicultural at all. In other words, multicultural ministry in my understanding and practice is the right tool for combating both colour racism and cultural racism. Indeed, it is not multicultural ministry unless it engages both forms of racism.

Similar debates and issues were raised at inter committee meetings and discussions following the multicultural ministry consultation. A consensus was reached on the significance of multicultural ministry to the life and future of the URC, but with an equally strong commitment

to ensuring that the church does not lose its focus on racism and racial justice. It was therefore agreed that the name of the Programme should be changed to give both racial justice and multicultural ministry equal symbolic prominence even if in practice there was no clear cut distinction as some may think. Mission Council brought a motion to General Assembly in 2004 to rename the Racial Justice Ministry by adding to it *Multicultural Ministry*.

General Assembly agrees that:

- a) the Racial Justice Committee be renamed the Racial Justice and Multicultural Ministry Committee;
- b) there should be cross representation between the Racial Justice and Multicultural Ministry Committee and other Assembly committees, together with the opportunity for an occasional inter-committee forum, to ensure its work is effectively integrated with the whole work of the United Reformed Church, and in particular with its work in developing relations with new migrant churches.⁵⁴³

Hence an emerging ministry became official and the work towards a multicultural church was to be taken to the next level.

(v) Racial Justice & Multicultural Ministry (RJMM)

Clearly, the work really needed to step up as the ministry became more fully recognized and its tasks and responsibilities clarified. By

⁵⁴³Assembly Annual Reports 2004 ResIn.8.

2005 the whole denomination had begun to engage in a very significant process called *Catch the Vision* (CTV) – a restructuring process seen as an opportunity for the Church to “seek to hear again God’s call and to re-vision what it means to be church” in the twenty first century, and led by the Assembly General Secretary, the Rev Dr David Cornick.⁵⁴⁴ There was a sense of urgency in the URC to rethink its mission and ecclesiology given the continuing decline in membership and resources, a rapidly changing world and society that has alienated and marginalized the Church itself, and the need for the Church to rethink what its ecumenical calling might be into the future. Considering the significance of this process to the URC’s life and future as a Church, which obviously has implications for its racial justice and multicultural ministry commitments and journey, a summary of the process follows.

The 2004 Assembly had endorsed a *Catch the Vision Prayer* as appropriately embodying the URC vision for its life and future

‘... we seek to be Christ’s people
transformed by the gospel
announcing good news to the poor,
proclaiming freedom for those in prisons of wealth,
poverty, disease and disorder,
committed to making a difference to the world’s kingdoms
as we live Christ’s kingdom...’⁵⁴⁵

⁵⁴⁴ Assembly Annual Reports 2004 CTV Report.

⁵⁴⁵ Assembly Annual Reports 2004, p.52.

Basically CTV was a four stage process which involved exploring: new ways of being church and doing mission; a slimmer and more rigorous organization; a renewed ecumenical commitment; and a new spirituality for the twenty first century. The first three stages of the process helped the URC focus its strategic thinking under the themes of *ecumenism, changing church, spirituality and core values, ways of working and finance and resources.*

That strategic thinking led to a reaffirmation of its ecumenical commitment, prioritizing of mission focus in the local church, commitment to enabling and encouraging new forms of being church, and responding to God's call to spiritual renewal as central to the Church's mission agenda. In practical terms, the URC reviewed its structures in 2005 and agreed on key changes, began a process of reprioritizing and reconfiguring the Church's mission resources and staffing in 2006, and in 2007 began a process of reflection on spirituality as its focus.

At that point the Church had reached the conclusion that God was not finished with the URC just yet and its task now was to work out how to live and be part of the scene.⁵⁴⁶ Prior to that, the URC had been consumed by its ecumenical commitment and vision of unity with its

⁵⁴⁶ The URC's commitment to organic unity has been so integral to its self-identity for so long that it was taken for granted that eventually it will 'die' as in cease to exist as the URC by merging with other denominations. Now it was clear that was not going to happen so a commitment to 'living' became the new vision.

ecumenical partners. It was ready to die for the sake of the unity of the body of Christ.

From the perspective of racial justice and multicultural ministry, a significant part of the changes taking place had to do with increasing cultural diversity both within and beyond the Church. Such a reality required the church to prioritise the task of “seriously engaging with cultural diversity and what it means to be a multicultural church.”⁵⁴⁷

Proponents of the ministry felt that this was a *kairos* moment for the URC to articulate its self-understanding as a community of difference that has the capacity to model what it means to be Christ’s multicultural and inclusive community of faith.⁵⁴⁸ Such a commitment to inclusion was seen as “critical at a time when social and political rhetoric sought to exclude rather than embrace.”⁵⁴⁹

At this point taking the racial-ethnic diversity work to the next level meant really calling the URC to account in terms of its commitment to being a truly multicultural Body of Christ. This meant committing to honest and open conversations, self-examination, and prayerful reflection about its readiness to do what it needed to do, i.e. to act to equip all levels of its life to “build a United Reformed Church that is truly hospitable to the whole people of God rejoicing in the gifts, and

⁵⁴⁷ Assembly Annual Reports 2005, RJMM.

⁵⁴⁸ Assembly Annual Reports 2005, para 1.3.

⁵⁴⁹ Assembly Reports 2005, para.1.3.

opportunities for service they bring.”⁵⁵⁰ Put another way, the time had come for the United Reformed Church to “make clear its commitment to becoming a multicultural church [that] welcomes people of all backgrounds nurturing, supporting and utilising their gifts for leadership and full participation in the life of the church.”⁵⁵¹

No doubt the URC strives to respond to the call to be “diverse, lively, inclusive and flexible” and to embrace cultural diversity just as it faithfully witnesses to its unity in Christ.⁵⁵² Indeed, changing the ministry’s title to Racial Justice and Multicultural Ministry in 2004 signaled its commitment to developing and widening the scope of multicultural ministry in its life. However, living and witnessing as a multicultural church continues to be a challenge. While it worked hard “to rejoice in the rich mix of ethnic cultures that is so characteristic of British life”, it still had some way to go in welcoming the “strangers looking for belonging.”⁵⁵³

So, difficult questions needed to be asked and to be responded to. But just as important was to be reminded of how far the URC had come in its awareness of, and engagement with, the issues of ‘race’ and cultural diversity. The URC has a history of striving to be a racially just community of Christ. Revisiting that history was important not only to

⁵⁵⁰ Assembly Reports 2005, para 7.1.

⁵⁵¹ Assembly Reports 2005, para 7.2.

⁵⁵² Assembly Reports 2005, para 3.5.

⁵⁵³ Assembly Rep. 2005, para 3.3.

remind the denomination of this significant part of its tradition, but also as a means of encouraging and inspiring its membership to continue to engage that tradition thoughtfully. It was also a way of recognizing those faithful servants over the years who have given so much of themselves to the cause, and a reminder of the importance of persistence and endurance because the needed changes do not happen overnight.

The following table is a summary of URC policies against racism from 1978 to 2005:

URC Declarations Against Racism 1978 - 2004		
Year	Issue	Resolution No.
1978	British Council of Churches (BCC) Statement on Racism	4
1980	BCC & Racism	1
1981	British Nationality Bill	3
1987	Declaration on Racism	4
1990	Equal Opportunities	7
1994	Equal Opportunities	7
"	Charter for Church	19
"	Respect of Cultures	20a
"	Multiracial Ministry	20b
1996	Multiracial Dev Worker	7
"	Refugee & Asylum Seekers	22
2000	Appointment of Secretary for RJ	49
2001	Refugee & Asylum	40
2003	"	27
2004	British National Party	MC
"	RJMM (Title)	8
2005	RJMM (Audit)	34 a)-e)
"	Equal Opportunities (Panels & Boards)	16
"	Equal Opps (Legal)	17
"	Equal Opps (Monitoring)	36

Clearly these Assembly resolutions reflect a serious commitment to living and witnessing to relationships of justice and integrity. Of particular significance is the *URC 1987 Declaration on Racism* in which it acknowledged its failure to break down the institutional and structural “barriers which deny black people a just share of power and decision-making [and] affirmed the richness of life that true multicultural sharing can bring.”⁵⁵⁴

Interestingly, the Equal Opportunities Resolution passed in 1994 stressed that as a statement it was only “an aid to appointing the most suitable people to all positions of responsibility within the church disregarding irrelevant considerations; it does not oblige the church as employer or otherwise to make appointments of people other than those most capable of fulfilling the responsibilities.”⁵⁵⁵ Implicit in these words is the tension between the universal and the particular – i.e. the desire to treat everyone equally without disrespecting specific and unique gifts. But the emphasis on merit in this resolution does give rise to some concern because it implies that here again we encounter the misconception that treating everyone the *same* is synonymous with *equal* treatment.⁵⁵⁶

⁵⁵⁴ Assembly Annual Reports, RJMM, para.4.5.

⁵⁵⁵ Assembly Rep., 1994 Resolution.7b).

⁵⁵⁶ See Chapter One of the Thesis.

It is important for the multicultural vision that all persons appointed to a position possess appropriate skills and gifts for the particular ministry or work involved. And given the imbalance in representation and influence that continues to exist between minority ethnic and white members of the denomination, some extra effort and intentional strategies were needed to address that imbalance.

Already, in collaboration with the Church and Society, Equal Opportunities, and Nominations Committees, some steps were taken over the years to tackle representation in committees and councils but still quite incremental. Sadly, the stark reality now was to acknowledge that in almost three decades of wrestling with racial-ethnic diversity “true multicultural sharing” was still vision and not reality. The URC was still “largely mono-cultural” in its leadership and decision-making councils.⁵⁵⁷ Undoubtedly, a more intensive approach was called for.

Like any other institution, the Church is often oblivious to “how its structures and practices exclude people” so attention must be given to examining “rigorously its ways of conduct” and to considering the “consequences of its policies, practices, and procedures for minority ethnic peoples and those on the margins.”⁵⁵⁸ Clearly, what was

⁵⁵⁷ Assembly Report. 1994.

⁵⁵⁸ Assembly Rep. 1995, para 4.6.

required - in David Cornick's words - was "serious self-analysis and the deliberate creation of equal opportunities, for only so can God's gifts be fully appreciated."⁵⁵⁹ In the interest of furthering the URC's commitment to growing as a multicultural church and "to the Lord's work of healing the divisions in the human family" the Committee for Racial Justice and Multicultural Ministry resolved to bring the following resolutions to the 2005 Assembly:⁵⁶⁰

Resolution 34 Developing Multicultural Ministry

The Committee asks that General Assembly commits to the following practical steps to enable the United Reformed Church to further develop as a multicultural church:

- a) General Assembly requires racial awareness training to be included in the induction of future Assembly staff, employees and committee members, and instructs that provision be made for training all existing staff and committee members at least once every two years.
- b) General Assembly affirms its support for the Racial Justice Advocacy Network and strongly urges each synod or region to appoint a Racial Justice Advocate Co-ordinator and encourages congregations to support the advocacy by encouraging members to join the network.
- c) General Assembly instructs the Secretaries for Training, Ministries and Racial Justice and Multicultural Ministry to evaluate the accessibility to minority ethnic people of the systems of candidacy and training for Ministers of Word and Sacrament, Church Related Community Workers, lay preachers and lay leaders, and to report with recommendations to Mission Council no later than March 2006.
- d) General Assembly authorises the Committee for Racial Justice and Multicultural Ministry to conduct an audit of church structures, policies, procedures and practices for the presence of barriers to full participation of minority ethnic people, and to

⁵⁵⁹ Assembly Rep. 2005, CTV.

⁵⁶⁰ Assembly Rep. 2005.

report with recommendations to Mission Council no later than October 2006.

e) General Assembly endorses the *Guidelines for welcoming and Receiving Migrant Churches* and commends them to the United Reformed Church.

In addition to passing resolution 34, the 2005 Assembly also passed Resolution 16 targeting representation on panels and boards:

General Assembly instructs the Nominations Committee to monitor appointments to the Assessment Board, the Commission Panel for the Disciplinary Process and the Panel for the appointment and review of Synod Moderators in order to further its Equal Opportunities objectives and sets the following targets for the lists of nominations to each of these bodies presented in the annual report to Assembly:

- a) An equal number of men and women.
- b) At least 10% representation from minority ethnic groups.

and Resolution 36 on *Equal Opportunities Monitoring*, instructing the Nominations Committee to:

...monitor the appointments of Synod Moderators, Assembly Appointed Staff, Westminster College Staff and the conveners of Assembly Committees in order to seek a balance in those groupings which matches the balance in other nominations of:
a) an equal number of men and women; b) at least 10% representation from minority ethnic groups.⁵⁶¹

General Assembly 2005 made a historic statement when it declared the United Reformed Church a Multicultural Church.⁵⁶² Referring to this statement, David Cornick said:

⁵⁶¹Assembly Annual Rep. 2005

⁵⁶²Resolution 52, Assembly Rep. 2005

The church is properly a prophetic community. In 2005 the United Reformed Church General Assembly acted prophetically. It proclaimed itself a multicultural church.⁵⁶³

The decisions General Assembly made in 2005 were highly significant for several reasons but most importantly for me as Assembly Secretary for Racial Justice and Multicultural Ministry, those decisions were the permission I needed to begin to address some of the more difficult and institutionalized blockages to the URC becoming a truly multicultural church. Recognising and appreciating the continuing gap between statements and practices, between aspiration and reality, these decisions needed to be made to signal the URC's seriousness about growing as a multicultural church and allowed me the means to examine two key issues in the life of the denomination: Theological Education and Training 34 c) and Institutionalised Racism 34 e). The latter obviously had important implications for the Equal Opportunities Resolutions 16 and 36 and so took up a bit of my time as well.

It was fortunate that 2006 was not an Assembly reporting year for the work of racial justice and multicultural ministry.⁵⁶⁴ I was faced with three major pieces of work, two of which had to be reported to Mission Council in March and October 2006 consecutively. This was in addition to the follow up actions associated with the rest of Resolution 34, and

⁵⁶³ Tahaafe-Williams & Ackroyd, 2005, p.3

⁵⁶⁴ Due to the many areas of ministry General Assembly had to receive reports from annually, it was decided that each ministry area would only report every second year.

without even mentioning the ongoing programs I was currently running and facilitating. It was going to be a rather frantic eighteen months. The following table gives an idea of the RJMM programs and activities running at the time:

Table 1

RJMM Program Outline 2006		
Program	Details/Activities	Timeframe
<i>Education, Training and Awareness Raising</i>	Seminars, workshops, conferences, preaching and keynote speaking	Bi-monthly/quarterly/annually/ongoing
"	Resources: 'We Belong', 'The Multicultural Ministry Toolkit', 'Redeeming the Times', 'Transformative Justice'	produced/ongoing use
"	Racial Justice Sunday	Annual/ongoing
<i>Empowerment and Supporting Black and Minority Ethnic Ministries</i>	Ethnic Minority Lay and Ordained Ministers' Assoc. (EMLOMA Remit)	Quarterly/ongoing
"	URC Minority Ethnic Conferences (MEC Guidelines)	Annually/Biennial/ongoing
"	Receiving Migrant Churches (RMC Guidelines)	Ongoing
"	Developing and supporting multicultural congregations (MMT)	Ongoing
<i>Advocacy</i>	RJMM Advocacy Network (JD & Synod Policy)	Quarterly/ongoing
<i>Youth Program</i>	Multicultural Youth Forum (Remit)	Quarterly/ongoing
<i>Ecumenical & Public Forums</i>	Churches Commission for Racial Justice (CCRJ)	Quarterly/ongoing
"	World Council of Churches (Transformative Justice/Anti-Racism Consultations /Assembly & CWME /Ecumenical Network for Multicultural Ministry)	
"	CWM European Region (Multicultural Ministry Consultations)	Limited (2005-2008)
"	Minority Ethnic Christians' Concerns Assoc	Monthly/ongoing
"	Home Office Diversity Forum and Cohesive Community Initiative	Limited (12m)
<i>Church Policy & Implementation</i>	2005 - 06 Assembly & MC Resolutions	Ongoing
<i>Other Ministry Areas</i>	Inter Faith Relations	Ongoing
"	International Exchange (Receiving Mission Partners)	Ongoing

In the meantime of course the Catch the Vision process was in full flow and it was important for me to keep an eye on that process ensuring that the racial justice and multicultural ministry work was connected to and informed by it.

Fortunately, the follow-up work on theological training and learning was led by two willing colleagues, Rev Roy Lowe who was then Assembly Secretary for Training and Rev Dr John Campbell, the then Principal of Northern College and a member of the Racial Justice and Multicultural Ministry Committee. This meant that my involvement was more manageable. It did not take long for us to realise that there would be significant overlaps between the work we needed to do in relation to Resolution 34 c) and d). So the decision was made to take a preliminary report to Mission Council March 2006 and ask permission for the two issues to be addressed together in the same audit process so as to avoid duplications. The Training Committee with the agreement of RJMM Committee took the proposal to Mission Council:

Mission Council received an interim report from the Committee indicating that work was underway but that there was considerable overlap of related resolutions passed by General Assembly. Mission Council agreed that the committee should defer its report and recommendations on Resolution 34c until October 2006 when it would be considered in a broader context.⁵⁶⁵

⁵⁶⁵ Assembly Annual Rep.2006, MSC para 3.3.1

In regards to the equal opportunities monitoring work, the Secretary of the Nominations Committee, Rev Liz Brown, was handling things very competently. Again my involvement was significant but manageable.

The bulk of work that took so much more of my time was the audit for blockages to minority ethnic full participation in all areas in the life of the Church. Following the Assembly decisions, I immediately moved to form an ecumenical audit group to work with me in taking forward Resolutions 34 c) and d). By mid-2006 it was clear to us that we would not be able to complete our task in time for Mission Council in October. We needed more time and the October Mission Council granted us that time with the expectation that we would bring the completion of our work to Mission Council March 2007.

I include the audit report to Mission Council and an addendum in the appendices section of the study.⁵⁶⁶ In the meantime, a short summary and analysis of the report is given here.

Clearly, 2005 was a significant year for the development of multicultural church and ministry in the URC. This is the year that the URC General Assembly prophetically declared the United Reformed Church to be a Multicultural Church and committed to practical steps

⁵⁶⁶ See Appendix I.

for developing multicultural ministry. This is the year that the General Assembly passed Resolution 34 which set out several practical steps to assist the denomination grow as a multicultural Church, and indeed become a clear and visible reflection of its diverse membership at all levels of its life and witness. Specifically, Resolution 34 d) sets out the audit task that committed the denomination to a process of self-examination and assessment to determine how its structures, policies, procedures and practices might be blocking the full participation of its minority ethnic members in the Church's life and witness. In short, how its structures, processes, and procedures might be hindering it from becoming a truly multicultural and inclusive *ecclesia*.

As mentioned above, an Ecumenical Audit Group was set up to carry out the task. Our aim was to identify significant emerging snapshots and trends to indicate where and how the URC might encourage future growth in minority ethnic participation in the life and work of the denomination and to highlight some of the gaps that needed follow up.

The Group adopted various approaches that would yield information and perspectives including agreed key questions for conversations with specific church structures, leaders, councils, committees, and networks; face-to-face conversations with key church leaders, committees, and networks; and consideration and evaluation of relevant published materials. The Group's enquiry was focused in the

specific areas of leadership & development; theological training & the candidacy process; training for learning and serving & lay preaching; elders training and selection; publications and media representations; youth and children programmes.

A key area identified by the Group as a blockage to minority ethnic participation in the life of the URC was lack of visible representation in key councils and decision-making bodies of the church. This spurred the Group to bring a recommendation to Mission Council about making some special arrangements that would enable better minority ethnic representation at the next Assembly. This recommendation was to become Resolution 58 which played a pivotal role in the multicultural journey of the URC as seen at its 2007 Assembly.

What was clearly seen in the audit process was the URC's proactive commitment to grow as a truly multicultural and inclusive Church. If anything, the audit process highlighted the continuing need for the church to take a moral lead in society in modeling the kingdom of Christ to the world – a community of hope for inclusiveness, harmony, and respect. The URC's bold adoption of the multicultural vision was certainly a prophetic move. The fact that it embarked on a racial justice and multicultural audit process gives it credibility. But whether it can take the multicultural journey to the next level as a moral and

theological imperative together with all that implies was still to be seen.

In regards to theological training, Mission Council affirmed the Audit Report's assessment that theological education centres are crucial to both the thinking and activity of the Church because from these institutions ministers go on to be leaders in the local churches, and indeed the national and regional levels for several decades. Mission Council acknowledged the Report's concern that in our theological education centres there are few students and no staff at all, from black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds. The report however was optimistic, commending the Education and Learning Committee for prioritising the need to address its concerns regarding the selection of staff, the selection of students, the course contents, the books in our libraries, and indeed the whole cultural and spiritual approach to theological education and learning.

Mission Council further affirmed the Report's emphasis on the importance of ethnic monitoring for setting strategies for inclusiveness, the critical role church leadership must assume in promoting multicultural sensitivity, and the need for intentional measures to ensure balanced representation at all levels of decision making.

Parallel to the auditing process I was working with the Nominations and Equal Opportunities Committees on the monitoring and representation issues of Resolutions 16 & 36 which clearly overlapped with key concerns of the auditing process. We focused on producing a black and minority ethnic (BME) skills audit strategy to be incorporated in the URC Annual Returns.⁵⁶⁷ As confirmed by the audit process, such a strategy would go a long way in identifying appropriate gifts and skills in minority ethnic communities for serving the mission and ministries of the Church. Too often such concerns have turned into tokenistic practices that were totally unhelpful for the goal of growing a multicultural church. For instance, a minority ethnic person gets thrown into the deep end of some committee to which s/he had nothing useful to contribute but s/he happens to be of BME background. Unfortunately, this is a common approach in many denominations and while clearly offensive, I would disown it on the laziness factor alone. There are enough reasons to alienate a minority ethnic person in such situations without adding lack of relevant skills to the list.

After much consultation and meetings a BME Skills Audit form was agreed which Mission Council (Mar 07) endorsed:

⁵⁶⁷ The Nominations Committee records its response to the Assembly Resolutions 16 & 36 in its report to Assembly 2006: "The Committee had set up a process for consultation with the Equal Opportunities and Racial Justice and Multicultural Ministries Committees. Records were being kept of those approached to serve on committees and monitoring of appointments to committees would take place in consultation with the Equal Opportunities Committee." Assembly Report, 2006.

**UNITED REFORMED CHURCH
Racial Justice and Multicultural Ministry**

BLACK AND MINORITY ETHNIC SKILLS AUDIT

The United Reformed Church is committed to equal opportunities and has declared itself a multicultural church. As such it will aim to make use of the rich diversity of its membership and will ensure that all appointments are made without discrimination or prejudice. Currently there seems to be a shortage of black and minority ethnic representation and participation in the life of the whole church. In order to begin to address that imbalance the URC is developing a database of skills and interests among Black and Minority Ethnic members of local congregations. This database will enable suitably experienced people to be identified when opportunities arise in the future to nominate people onto decision-making Committees and Boards, and Appointing/Review Groups within the Church at local, regional and national levels (across Wales, Scotland, and England). Please take a few minutes to read and complete the following questionnaire.

SKILLS AND EXPERIENCE

Your skills and experience will have been acquired through work, as a volunteer in an organisation like a housing association, community organisation, political party, trade union, etc, or as a helper in your church. Please tick the item that best describes your experience and skills:

Administration	___	Health & Social Care	___
Counselling & Mental Health	___	Media	___
Accounting & Finance	___	Community & Team Building	___
Human Resources	___	Youth & Children's Work	___
Legal Matters	___	Writing Minutes & Keeping Records	___
Education & Teaching	___	Maintaining/Developing Buildings	___
Chairing Meetings	___	Other (.....)	___

AREAS OF INTEREST IN THE CHURCH

I would be interested in learning more about becoming:

- A worship leader _____
- A lay preacher _____
- A non-stipendiary minister _____
- A Church Related Community Worker _____
- A stipendiary minister _____

CHURCH GROUPS, BOARDS AND COMMITTEES I WOULD LIKE TO PARTICIPATE IN

- Synod (regional) Committees _____
- General Assembly (covering three nations) Committees _____
- in the areas of:
- Church & Society _____
- Ministries _____
- Finance & Trusts _____
- Other (.....) _____

NAME:

ADDRESS (including postcode):

Telephone (home):

Telephone (work):

Mobile:

E-mail address:

Local church where you are a member:

*DATA
PROTECTION ACT
The information
supplied will only
be used by the
United Reformed
Church for the
purposes of
administration.*

Thank you for completing this form. Please return it to:

**Mrs Katalina Tahaafe-Williams, Secretary for Racial Justice & Multicultural Ministry
The United Reformed Church, 86 Tavistock Place, London WC1H 9RT**

Undoubtedly, the skills audit strategy would be an effective long term instrument for addressing the imbalances in power and influence between BME and white members of the denomination. With this skills audit we can now compile useful data of people not only with the specific skills we need to serve on different committees and ministries in the church, but they will be people who would have signaled clear interest in serving in such areas. As can be seen in the list of Assembly Committees below, there is quite a huge area to cover and work to be done to ensure balanced representations are normative in the multicultural life and witness of the Church:

Assembly Committees	
Assembly Arrangements	Life and Witness
Church and Society	Ministries
Communications and Editorial	Nominations
Doctrine Prayer and Worship	Pastoral Reference Committee
Ecumenical	Racial Justice and Multicultural Ministry
Equal Opportunities	Education & Learning
Finance	Youth and Children's Work
Inter Faith Relations	

Recognising the necessity of an audit for blockages to minority ethnic participation in the whole life of the church, and the practical steps it helped achieve in the URC's progress to becoming a truly multicultural church, the audit process also exposed the weaknesses and gaps that

needed urgent attention. In a sense, the audit process was a wakeup call to just how much work still needed to be done. On the one hand, the aspiration and commitment to be a multicultural church was still very potent, on the other hand, the strength and endurance of the URC to go the long haul was being challenged. Nevertheless as the 2007 March Mission Council endorsed the audit report, there was a great sense of hope and anticipation as the denomination looked forward to the General Assembly in July.

(vi) *Living the Multicultural Vision*

The URC was entering into the final stage of the CTV process and with a palpable sense of vibrant energy and enthusiasm, the dominant theme possessing the Church's collective consciousness was living! No longer believing it was called to *die* the URC was keen to discover what it meant now to *live*. Tellingly, the CTV's commitment to living was articulated in terms of these priorities:

- Enabling and encouraging a conversation on core values and discipleship that is rooted in our Reformed heritage, and informed by the *five marks of mission, the three ecumenical principles, and the Catch the Vision Prayer*.
- Developing and sustaining a learning church with strategies for equipping its people with the language to articulate their faith and to live their faith post-Christendom.
- Celebrating the multicultural vision of a Church characterised by justice and mutual respect, working to overcome poverty and welcoming the development of multicultural churches and communities as an essential part of the way we are church.⁵⁶⁸

⁵⁶⁸Assembly Rep. 2005, CTV.

Caught up in the spirit of *living* and encouraged by the CtV's unambiguous commitment to the multicultural vision as essential to being church in the 21st century, the RJMM Committee began to seriously reflect on the three priorities above with a view to taking the next step in the racial justice and multicultural work. Clearly, mission and spirituality were to be the main focus of the final phase of the CTV process and the Committee was keen to make its contribution. Reflecting on the *five marks of mission*, the *three ecumenical principles*, and the *CTV Prayer*, the Committee rearticulated its multicultural vision to help map its way forward. The *five marks of mission* summarises the Church's missionary intent in terms of "proclaiming the good news, teaching, baptising and nurturing new believers, responding to human need by loving service, seeking to transform unjust structures, and safeguarding and sustaining creation."⁵⁶⁹ The *three ecumenical principles* as set out by the Ecumenical Committee and endorsed by the Assembly in the CTV process reaffirms the URC's ecumenical commitment to "deepen the nature of the Christian common life and witness locally," affirm our oneness in Christ and our rich diversity of cultures and faith traditions as integral to the Biblical values of love, peace and justice, and "persevere in the search for visible and organic unity" in hope that

⁵⁶⁹Assembly Rep. 2006 CTV.

“sometimes death-dealing divisions may be healed and the Christian message of reconciliation be proclaimed with integrity.”⁵⁷⁰

Equally mindful of the CTV Prayer which sets out the broad vision of the Church, the Committee re-imagined a multicultural United Reformed Church for the 21st century as a Christian community of faith where uniqueness of culture is recognised and unity in Christ is affirmed, acceptance and respect of the *other* is normative, decision-making is equally shared, ecumenism includes racial-ethnic harmony, dignity of life is universal, and all with or without faith are served with the love of Christ. In the very least the Committee envisioned a multicultural United Reformed Church where Christ is spoken, heard, and lived out.

Taking seriously the Church’s calling to *live* the Committee reflected on how the racial justice and multicultural ministry work may enrich and inform the spiritual life of the URC as it tries to discern its mission directions and priorities. It considered how RJMM may best serve the Church to become the multicultural church God needs it to be. Convinced of the centrality of the multicultural vision to the life and future of the URC as affirmed by the CTV process, encouraged by the 2005 Assembly’s prophetic multicultural statement, and the 2007 Mission Council’s endorsement of the audit report and

⁵⁷⁰Assembly Rep. 2006 CTV.

recommendations, the Committee was keen to take the work further. That meant recognising that now more than ever the Church needed the multicultural vision if it wanted to live. Undoubtedly the Church was growing more diverse. But the more diverse it became the more starkly exposed its great need to find strength to live with diversity positively. Living with diversity and difference united by the love of Christ is at the heart of the multicultural vision.

Further, while the Church's ecumenical commitment was important to its existence into the future, the reality now required that the Church prioritises internal ecumenism rather than organic unity if it is to live and be part of the scene. The strength and success of future organic unity will depend on how well the Church addresses the challenges of internal ecumenism – that is, the evangelical and liberal divide, the different levels of where people are in their faith journeys, and cultural and ethnic diversity.

Ironically, with the so-called human advancement and progress we hear about daily in the news media, human beings still struggle to cope with diversity adequately. At a time when issues of *culture, identity, diversity and difference* continue to be key challenges to human existence, the Church must make it a key priority to learn to cope with diversity positively. This has to be an intentional and conscious effort. It cannot be assumed that as a self-proclaimed

Christian community of faith, the Church will automatically live out the nature of its existence and function which is rooted in the barrier-breaking ministry and teachings of Christ. Why, because the Church is made up of vulnerable and fallible human beings. This is evident in our Christian Church history, and we see it in the current socio-economic and political context in which we live today. Justice, mutual respect, the equal sharing of power - these are values the committee upholds in its multicultural vision, seeing them as characteristics of a Church that truly lives.

With confidence bolstered by the above affirmations the Committee decided that the findings of the audit process needed to be taken further. Worthy of appreciation as the audit recommendations were, there were some reservations whether they were radical enough or gone far enough. Recognising the difficulty of getting BME representation to General Assembly, concerns were expressed about the possibility of a new and reduced General Assembly exacerbating that difficulty even more in the future.⁵⁷¹ The Committee wanted to take further the audit group's suggestion that special arrangements for representation be made for BME, women, and young people and if such arrangements were already in place for any group other than BME, then such arrangements be extended to BME. So a proposal

⁵⁷¹ One of the key changes proposed by the CTV process was that General Assembly will be reduced in membership and this to take effect from 2010.

based on these concerns was drafted for the 2007 General Assembly. As Secretary I consulted widely in preparation for Assembly, canvassing the views and harnessing support from key leaders and a range of groups and networks in the URC about the proposal. I consulted with the Assembly General Secretary and Clerk over the wording of the proposal.

Resolution58 BME Representation at General Assembly

General Assembly instructs that as from 2010, each synod shall appoint not less than one and preferably two of its representatives to Assembly from its black and minority ethnic constituencies. Should a synod be unable to make such an appointment, that place shall be transferable to another synod which can draw on representatives from BME communities.

2007 was the Bicentenary of the Abolition of the Slave Trade. As Secretary, I had done all the ground work already to prepare the Assembly for marking this important event. Mission Council had already debated whether the URC should make an *apology* for the transatlantic slave trade in which Britain and its institutions including the Church were complicit and out of which consequences continue to be part of the socio-economic and political reality of the society and the world two hundred years on. That Council settled on what it saw as a compromise - to bring a *Statement of Regret* to Assembly for endorsement – though not ideal from a racial justice and multicultural ministry perspective. Here I include the Racial Justice and Multicultural Ministry Committee (RJMM) proposals to October 2006 and March 2007 Mission Councils regarding the bicentenary of the abolition of the

slave trade. It is relevant because the whole issue about the slave trade and its abolition is at the heart of it about 'race' and racism. In many ways, the debate over the *apology* and the churches' role in that history and its consequences mirror much of the current debates on racism and multiculturalism. The resolution was jointly proposed by RJMM, Church and Society, and Life and Witness Committees:

Mission Council October 2006

As Britain prepares for the 2007 bicentenary of the Act to abolish the slave trade in the British colonies, an Act responding, in part, to a campaign involving many from British churches, our three committees believe this to be an opportunity for the United Reformed Church to prayerfully reflect about this tragic part of our shared history and how it impacts not only our present but our future as well. We believe this to be a God-given opportunity for the United Reformed Church, sharing in this history with our predecessors, to repent, seek forgiveness and reconciliation with our African sisters and brothers in our churches and beyond, for the sake of the healing, wholeness and unity of the Body of Christ. While deeply regretting our part in this grim history, we also express our total rejection of any form of slavery declaring it to be an abuse of human life and contrary to God's purposes for God's Kingdom.

We therefore ask that Mission Council:

1. Encourages synods and local churches to mark the 200th Anniversary of the Act to abolish the slave trade, ecumenically if possible, making use of worship resources, such as those prepared by the *Set All Free* project of Churches Together in England, Churches Commission for Racial Justice, and the URC Racial Justice and Multicultural Ministry Committee.
2. Asks Church and Society, Life and Witness and Racial Justice and Multi-Cultural Ministry committees to liaise with Assembly Arrangements committee over an appropriate form of commemoration of the anniversary, during General Assembly 2007, that would include a formal statement of *deep regret* ⁵⁷²in recognition of Britain's involvement and specifically the links that our own predecessors had to the slave trade.

⁵⁷² On 8 February 2006 the General Synod of the Church of England voted to apologise for its role in the Slave Trade.

3. Support the proposal for a UK annual Anti-Slavery Memorial ⁵⁷³Day by –
 - including the date in our Church calendar and asking all our churches to observe this date, remembering the past and present victims of the slave trade,
 - commit to working for justice and peace for all the peoples whose lives and livelihood continue to be affected by the consequences of the slave trade, and
 - commit to exposing and eradicating all contemporary forms of slavery today

The Racial Justice and Multicultural Ministry committee brings an update to Mission Council on the Mission Council October 2006 resolutions relating to the Abolition of the Slave Trade Bicentenary 2007:

1. The Committee presents to Mission Council the '*Lest They Be Forgotten*' worship resource we have developed for the use of the whole Church throughout the year 2007, and asks that Mission Council commends the resource to the churches and synods for their use at any time suitable and convenient during the year to commemorate this important event in our shared history;
2. The Committee is making arrangements to working closely with the Assembly Moderator and the Assembly Arrangements Committee to ensure that an appropriate form of commemoration of the anniversary is held at Assembly 2007 that would include a formal statement of deep regret in recognition of Britain's involvement and specifically the links of our own predecessors had to the slave trade;
3. The Committee is set to promote a UK annual Anti-Slavery Memorial Day once such a date is announced and confirmed, ensuring that it is included in our Church calendar and diary, and using it to promote the need for eradicating all forms of contemporary slavery.

Convener: Andrew Prasad
Secretary: Katalina Tahaafe-Williams
March 2007

I then focused my attention on ensuring that Assembly was enabled to mark this historical event sensitively and respectfully. In collaboration

⁵⁷³ A memorial day would emphasise the enslavement of Africans which consequences continue to influence the lives of their descendants both in Africa and diaspora today. Contemporary forms of slavery will be included in the memorial day but it is first and foremost about the enslavement of Africans and indigenous peoples.

and with the cooperation of the Assembly Moderator's Chaplain, I was satisfied that the multicultural vision was the dominant theme of the Assembly liturgically and audio-visually and that the arrangements for the Assembly commemoration of the bicentenary were done very thoughtfully and meaningfully.

So the Assembly business agenda right after the amazing commemoration event was the matter of BME representation in Assembly Resolution 58. There was a strong sense of optimism, hope and good will that permeated the whole Assembly after the bicentenary commemoration. The Assembly proceeded to adopt the Statement of Regret and then considered Resolution 58. However, in its wisdom Assembly decided to defer the debate on Resolution 58 to a later point in the conference due to pressure of time. Again in its wisdom Assembly only reintroduced Resolution 58 towards the end on the last day. People were tired and ready to go home. The debate was painful and not what I expected.

It was very clear that the URC Fellowship of United Reformed Youth (FURY) had mobilized and launched a campaign to defeat the resolution. Several Fury members were stationed strategically at the mikes on the floor of Assembly expressing their objections. I was shocked. I had joined Fury Assembly just a few days earlier to discuss the resolution and I could not be more wrong in thinking that they

were on board. My observation from the stage based on the speakers I saw and heard, and on the blue and orange cards (the consensus model of decision making where blue means a 'no' vote and orange means a 'yes' vote) waving from the floor, the mood of the Assembly in general was not overwhelmingly negative but the youth voice was persuasive. The objection was based on the usual misconception that all must be treated the *same* as a sign of equality. Yet, it seemed to sit well with FURY that special arrangements were already in place for youth representation at the new and reduced Assembly 2010. Apparently, FURY was quite comfortable to accept preferential treatment and to be the beneficiary of positive discrimination where young people were concerned! The irony was not lost on me as I looked at the young people and FURY leaders in the Assembly hall. I would add too that FURY itself was overwhelmingly white and middle-class which was a key motivation for including multicultural youth programs in the multicultural ministry priorities.

The debate went back and forth with motions to amend words and delete sentences and so on. It began to drag on. A proposal was made to defer the matter to the next Assembly. It was clear that with the show of blue and orange cards, Resolution 58 was not getting the required two-thirds majority. The outgoing RJMM convenor, the incoming RJMM convenor, and the Assembly General Secretary had a quick conversation with me and we made the decision to withdraw

Resolution 58 and to bring it back to Assembly 2008. We could not risk having the resolution defeated. Needless to say I was devastated. The Assembly General Secretary with candour expressed his great disappointment with what had just taken place. And he made the pledge that the proposal would be brought back in 2008 and that he would do everything he needed to do to ensure that Assembly will adopt it then.

It was a distinctly bizarre experience going from that devastating moment where the Church had demonstrated convincingly the thriving existence of white supremacy and institutional racism, to a visibly multicultural closing worship where God's gift of spiritual diversity and graces were so inappropriately evident. Inappropriate because the images portrayed from the stage and the words we heard and sang (or some of us sang) proclaimed how blessed we were with such rich diversity, yet at that moment the dominance of the white group could not be more prominent. Inappropriate because we were hearing and speaking Christ's promise of justice, unity, and love and yet we've just experienced comprehensively the human inability to live out those promises.

And the energy, vibrancy and optimism that were palpable at the beginning of the Assembly were clearly not present. The handful of minority ethnic people present who were not voting members of

Assembly but were there specifically to show solidarity and support for the proposal could not sing the words and like me, we just stood silently for the hymns and sat silently through everything else. The Assembly Moderator's chaplain, who did such a fantastic job of ensuring we had the most meaningfully multicultural Assembly I've ever experienced during my time in the URC, especially in the worship and liturgy, and utilizing the enormous physical space around us creatively to convey inclusive multicultural messages in symbolism, visual images and displays, tried valiantly to close the Assembly on a high note. She shared with me afterwards her sense of shame and regret.

I could not have asked for a worse farewell although at that point I had not declared to the Assembly that I was likely to leave the URC and follow my husband and daughter back to the Uniting Church in Australia. My husband had responded positively to a call to local ministry in Sydney and our twelve year old daughter wanted to go too. I preferred to stay in the UK but felt I had no choice. He needed to start in September 2007 but I wanted to finish out the year in the URC. So we all flew to Sydney together to settle them into our new home and to make sure our daughter settled into her new school. Then I returned to the UK to finish up my job, and at least be there for the Inaugural Annual URC Multicultural Celebration in London that I had organized for early December 2007.

That was an amazing and wonderful event of celebrating the richness of diverse cultures in the URC, sharing in multicultural worship, music, dance, food, and fellowship with a keynote from the Bishop of Southwark, Rt Revd Dr Thomas Butler, and the URC General Assembly Moderator Revd Prof Stephen Orchard gave the homily. All the Assembly leaders were present which was very significant symbolically as a strong message to the whole Church of their support, but especially to the minority ethnic communities that their Church leaders care about them, recognize them and take seriously what they have to offer the Church as it seeks to carry out God's life-giving mission. It became my farewell too. I was filled with a mixture of elation and deep sadness for while the disappointment of the Assembly was still wearing off, here was a clear expression of the multicultural vision that our General Assembly had failed to recognize and appreciate.

On a positive note, I had planned this event to be an ongoing annual multicultural event of the URC recognizing the importance of celebratory and inspirational events to growing a multicultural church. I left the URC with the assurance that this inaugural annual multicultural celebration would indeed continue to be held annually and the rest of the RJMM programme were in hand with the new RJMM Committee convenor stepping into gear to ensure a replacement for me was secured.

(vii) A Summary of the Journey

At this point it is appropriate to refer to my exit report as part of the overall summary for this chapter.⁵⁷⁴ That report also summarises the multicultural journey of the URC as it details not just what had been achieved but give some theological directions for the future in the light of the new changes that were taking place in the denomination.

Looking at my exit report gave me a sense of hope. It did not always seemed or felt like changes were happening. But the exit report is a reminder of all the work that has been done and all the good things that have been achieved. It is also a reminder of the potential yet to be realised and that can be exciting too. The URC is still on a journey to becoming a truly inclusive and multicultural church. And the journey itself can be the most meaningful part. In the very least, the exit report can be a multicultural ministry manual or guideline for the next phase of the URC's multicultural journey. It can help avoid some of the pitfalls whilst maximizing the impact of what works for developing multicultural ministry and for growing the multicultural URC.

Early 2008 I was teaching public and contextual theology at the UCA Theological College in Sydney when the RJMM convenor joyfully

⁵⁷⁴ See Appendix II.

informed me that my replacement was found in Dr Michael Jagessar, formerly a member of the teaching staff at Queens College, Birmingham. I knew Michael and I could not be more thrilled. Shortly after, I was informed that the Thames North Synod of the URC had appointed the former convenor of the RJMM Committee, the Rev Dr Andrew Prasad as synod moderator. I had been monitoring the selection and appointment process from Sydney as I had earlier received a request for reference for one of the candidates. This was indeed a historical moment in the life of the URC and in that particular synod. This would be the first minority ethnic synod moderator in the history of the URC.

As was reflected in the audit report, leadership was a key area where the Church's multicultural commitment needed to be more visibly demonstrated. It was a quiet moment of poignant jubilation for me as I was particularly moved. In July 2008 both the former and current RJMM convenors (the former convenor now the synod moderator for Thames North) joyfully informed me that General Assembly passed Resolution 58 by consensus – they described to me an image of the Assembly hall as a sea of waving orange cards. In 2010, my successor, Michael Jagessar, became the URC General Assembly

Moderator elect.⁵⁷⁵ There are no words to describe how I felt except to say, 'God is good!'

Analysis

The period 2001 – 2007 set the stage for the next level of the URC's journey to being a multicultural church. In tracing the historical steps and developments that took place during this period, I hoped not only to highlight some of the complexities and challenges that such changes inevitably reveal and lead to, but also to address some preliminary questions about the relationship between policy and practice, institutional structures and grassroots networks and initiatives.

The events that took place during this period constitute both the consequences of events and actions taken previously and the building blocks for what was to come in the next period in the life of the Church, and in the journey to become a more culturally inclusive Church. But the processes leading up to these changes clearly suggested the dialectic relationship between the grassroots and the

⁵⁷⁵ Of course in the scheme of things the URC was running behind in these areas because the Methodist Church of Great Britain had already had its first minority ethnic President some years before in Rev Dr Interjit Bhogal and the Church of England nearly elected a minority ethnic Archbishop of Canterbury but went instead for Rowan Williams so I had to be satisfied with the Archbishop of York, John Santamu, as a key leader in that Church who was not white.

structures of the Church. There was also indication of the influence of the wider society.

This suggested that the influences from the ground must never be underestimated and on the other hand, the impact of symbolic statements from *on high* cannot be dismissed out of hand either. In other words, the indications were that statements of policy do make a difference to the realities on the ground, and the actions at the grassroots do have an impact on what happens at the institutional structures.

Conclusions about the possibility of a multicultural church cannot be drawn conclusively from this period, as the period itself was part of the multicultural process, growth and ongoing journey of the URC. What can be said of this period is that from it emerged multicultural ministry as an official part of the mission agenda of the URC and that the next level of seeing this emerging ministry in practice and the multicultural vision lived out would take time and would take place incrementally. The nature of change in any institution is that it just takes time. It can at least be said that in this period, the URC had clearly evolved in its understanding of what it means to be a multicultural church and given the associated challenges and difficulties it continued to affirm its call to be a multicultural church.

Certainly, multicultural ministry as a programmatic tool showed definite signs of its great value in practice.

Retrospective Critique

The URC was and is a white middle class liberal Church. I believe it to be a Church that genuinely desires to do the will of God, to do justice, to be relevant in the world today. It is a Church that is totally committed to the goal of the unity of the body of Christ in the world. And in the matter of racial justice and multicultural ministry, it was not unique among white western churches in its responses and reactions to the challenges of cultural difference and diversity. Looking back on those 6 years I am not sure that I would have, or could have, done anything differently.

In that period, the events and changes were largely positive for the work of racial justice and for the multicultural goal. But that was mainly because much of the painful and hard foundational work had begun in the early years of the denomination's existence, both at the grassroots and at the institutional level by black and white people who wanted to be part of a racially just and inclusive church.

Nevertheless, the changes within those six years were not without pain, conflict and controversy. The institution had to be dragged kicking and screaming by the effort of the grassroots to make the needed change. These changes and events suggest that multicultural ministry as a programmatic tool needs further consideration for its value and influence in growing a multicultural church. Concerted community and grassroots effort whilst absolutely critical still needs focused programmatic tools to co-ordinate those valuable efforts as well as ensure practical implementation of policies are carried out. A comparative study of similar denominations in other parts of the world will help demonstrate further the critical value of multicultural ministry. This is the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter Four

ECCLESIAL ASPIRATIONS II

Comparative Study The Uniting Church in Australia is a Multicultural Church!

Formed on 22 June 1977 as a union between the Congregational Union in Australia, the Methodist Church of Australasia, and the Presbyterian Church of Australia, the Uniting Church in Australia from the outset believed that “Christians in Australia are called to bear witness to a unity of faith and life in Christ which transcends cultural and economic, national and racial boundaries”, and had imagined itself to be a Church called “to be a fellowship of reconciliation, a body within which the diverse gifts of its members are used for the building up of the whole, an instrument through which Christ may work and bear witness to himself.”⁵⁷⁶ This calling is at the heart of the multicultural ecclesial vision of God’s future out of which the church must now live.⁵⁷⁷

⁵⁷⁶ Uniting Church in Australia (UCA), “Basis of Union” (BU), Constitution and Regulations, 2012 edn. (Sydney: UCA, 2012), paragraphs 2 & 3.

⁵⁷⁷ Gonzalez stresses this point of the church living out of God’s multicultural future in chapter 2 of the study, drawing on Revelations 7.

With a strong emphasis on church unity and oneness in Christ since he “is Head over all things” and he continues to “constitute, rule, and renew his Church”, the UCA Basis of Union articulates a serious commitment to being faithful to Christ’s inclusive ministry in how the UCA goes about being church in a very multicultural Australian context.⁵⁷⁸ It is therefore reasonable to suppose that the multicultural ecclesial vision had already infected the lifeblood of the UCA through its founding document. This is not surprising since “from the time of church union, the Uniting Church has had among its members people from cultures and traditions other than the English, Scottish, Welsh and Irish” and they included “Dutch, Hungarian, Fijian, Samoan, Tongan and Korean” and of course, Indigenous Australians.⁵⁷⁹ The ongoing task is to ensure that the vision is made manifest in meaningful and vibrant ways in the Church’s life and witness.

A Pilgrim People on the Way to the Promised End

Framing its self understanding in terms of being part of “the people of God on the way to the promised end” the UCA remains ever open to God’s power of transformation to “constantly correct what is erroneous in her life” anticipating the need for flexibility and adaptability in

⁵⁷⁸ UCA Basis of Union, paragraphs 3 & 4.

⁵⁷⁹ J. Brown, ‘The Uniting Church is a Multicultural Church’, in S. Yoo et al (eds), Building Bridges: Sharing Life and Faith in a Multicultural Church, (Sydney: UCA National Mission & Evangelism Committee, 1993), p.5.

changing contexts and times.⁵⁸⁰ Almost a decade on from union and faced with the unavoidable reality of cultural diversity and its associated challenges in the society and in the church, the Basis of Union again provided the grounding for building a multicultural Uniting Church as integral to how the people of God can serve “God’s promised end.”⁵⁸¹ The UCA response to the reality of cultural diversity reflects a serious commitment to living into God’s future by building a multicultural church that is “a foretaste of the ultimate church” and an openness to embracing multicultural diversity as a great opportunity for ministry and mission.⁵⁸² So at its Fourth Assembly in 1985 the UCA made the bold declaration that it is a multicultural church. The statement’s significance and singularly defining role in the subsequent development of the UCA as a multicultural church warrants its inclusion here:

1. The Uniting Church in Australia is a union of Congregational, Methodist and Presbyterian Churches. Its unity is both the gift of God through Christ who is the head of the Church and the fruit of the labours of those who sought to be responsive to the prayer of Christ that his disciples might be one.
2. The *Basis of Union* also points to the fact that the Uniting Church unites not only three former denominations, but also Christians of many cultures and ethnic origins: the Uniting Church ‘believes that Christians in Australia are called to bear witness to a unity of faith, and life in Christ which transcends cultural and economic, national and racial boundaries’. (para 2) Jesus Christ has made peace between people of every race, culture and class. This unity too is a gift of God, a foretaste of the reconciliation of all things in Christ. It is also a goal to be achieved as we commit ourselves in one fellowship to achieve

⁵⁸⁰ Basis of Union, para.18.

⁵⁸¹ Basis of Union, para.3.

⁵⁸² Basis of Union, para.3.

justice, affirm one another's cultures, and care for any who are the victims of racial discrimination, fear and economic exploitation.

3. The Fourth Assembly of the Uniting Church welcomes the progress that has been made in the last twenty years towards the formation of a society in Australia in which people of many races and cultures live together. The Assembly rejoices that successive governments have substantially removed racial criteria from the policies covering the selection of migrants and the reception of refugees, and that in particular significant groups of people from Asia and the Pacific have been welcomed to this land.
4. The fact that our membership comprises people of many races, cultures and languages is a reminder that the Church is both product and agent of mission. In the Church the Kingdom which is to come is experienced in the ambiguity of the tension between the old age which has not yet passed away and the new age which has not yet fully come. As part of that Church which is a sign of and witness to the Kingdom, the multicultural Uniting Church seeks to be a sign of hope within the Australian community, and particularly to those who are pushed to its fringes on racial and economic grounds.
5. It is essential therefore to provide for full participation of Aboriginal and ethnic people, women and men, in decision making in the councils of the Church; to ensure that these groups have equitable rights in the use of Uniting Church properties and access to its resources; and to include their concerns and perspectives in the agendas of the councils of the Church. The Uniting Church seeks to be open to the changes that the Holy Spirit will bring to the Church because of the creative contributions of people of different racial and cultural groups to its life.⁵⁸³
6. The ethnic and Aboriginal congregations are a sign of the diversity of the cultures of the members of the Uniting Church. Organisation of the Church in ethnic congregations enables us to worship in familiar languages, to hear the gospel in terms of our several identities and cultures, and to provide pastoral care for all our people. There is a risk, however, that the establishment of ethnic Congregations will become a means whereby the rest of the Church is insulated from the hurts and struggles of Australia's minorities. Opportunities should be made, therefore, for bilingual worship, and for fellowship across racial and cultural boundaries.
7. There is a great variety among ethnic Congregations. This produces diverse relationships between such Congregations and other Congregations of the Uniting Church. Situations in which the minister has been settled in Australia for several years will be different from

⁵⁸³ It is noted that the term *ethnic* is part of the original text of the document but the study has addressed in previous chapters the problems associated with this term. The more acceptable term (that also has its problems) as far as the study is concerned is *minority ethnic* recognizing that there are *ethnic majority* as well as *ethnic minority* groups.

those in which a minister has recently arrived from another country. First generation settlers often seek the security of a Congregation of their own culture and traditions. Their desire for such close security is to be respected, and such a Congregation may be organized as a Parish of the Church. Where there is preparedness to reach out to people of other cultures, the Assembly encourages the establishment of multicultural Parishes. It supports a policy in which ministers of different ethnic backgrounds will plan and share the ministry in Congregations, some of which are culturally mixed, and some of which meet separately for reasons of language.

8. The Assembly recognises the need for special ministerial education programs to prepare people for ministry in multicultural Parishes, and ethnic Congregations. For those who are to minister to multicultural Parishes, sociological studies on contemporary, urban society where different cultural groups live side by side and interact will be important. Because the gospel speaks with direct relevance to situations of political oppression and economic exploitation, an awareness of what is happening at the points of interaction between different racial and cultural groups in Australia will be essential for ministry. The Assembly recognises that candidates for ministry with ethnic Congregations need to be aware of the theological and ecclesial traditions of the Church(es) from which the members of the Congregation have come, and also need to have an opportunity to reflect theologically on the life situation of the members of the Congregation here in Australia. This may require theological study in both countries, and effective ministry will certainly be enhanced by field education with a migrant Congregation in Australia.
9. The Uniting Church welcomes those Christians of other Church traditions who find in the *Basis of Union* and the life of the Uniting Church a faith community of which they want to be part, but rejects any form of proselytism as inappropriate in the ecumenical fellowship of the Church. Presbyteries are encouraged, therefore, to assist ethnic Congregations of other Christian traditions to provide adequate pastoral care for their people, and to obtain access to buildings suitable for their needs.⁵⁸⁴

This was a historic statement which committed the UCA to the "reconciliation of all people in Christ and their incorporation from different races into one community; seeking fuller participation of members of migrant, ethnic and Aboriginal congregations in the

⁵⁸⁴ R. Bos & G. Thompson, Theology for Pilgrims: Selected Theological Documents of the Uniting Church in Australia, (Sydney: Uniting Church Press, 2008), pp.622-625.

decision-making councils of the church; advocating equitable rights to the use of property and access to the church's resources; and seeking to be open to the contributions that people of different cultures have to make to the life of the church."⁵⁸⁵

As it was the UCA National Commission for World Mission that brought the multicultural proposal to the 1985 Assembly, it was the Commission that was then given the task of implementing policies to give effect to the statement including the incorporation of "languages other than English" in the worship during special gatherings of the church; ensuring that membership of boards and committees were more culturally diverse; addressing multicultural concerns and needs in meeting agendas; translation of key documents into other languages including the Basis of Union; and publication of information packs on resettlement for migrant groups.⁵⁸⁶

In addition, the Assembly asked the Commission to initiate "a process of reflection on the significance of ethnic diversity for the life of the Uniting Church" culminating in a national consultation in 1990. Beginning with regional conferences which concluded with the 1990 national gathering, the Commission clarified three focus areas of development: "a policy on the transfer of the rights to the use of

⁵⁸⁵ Brown, in Yoo, Building Bridges, p.6.

⁵⁸⁶ *ibid.*

property from one congregation to another within the UCA; educational resources specifically for ethnic congregations; and modification of regulations and practices of the church as they apply to Asian and Pacific Islands congregations.”⁵⁸⁷

In 1996 a second national consultation on *cross-cultural ministry in a changing Australia* was held out of which a multicultural vision for the whole church which basically was a clear definition of a multicultural church was articulated:

- *A Common Faith*: A multicultural church is united by a common faith in the triune God and the desire to serve and witness to the compassion, love and justice of God. The image of the church as the body of Christ means that we who are in Christ have a variety of gifts, functions and cultures and yet we can be connected to each other without doing everything the same way. We have our cultural differences and yet we can work together within the framework of what the Uniting Church in Australia is. This framework is set out in the Basis of Union and Constitution which establishes the foundation of our commitment to Christian unity.
- *Affirming One Another's Culture*: A multicultural church is one with an inclusive understanding and acceptance of all cultures. It is a church where one can sustain one's own cultural identity while affirming others. It is a church where every culture is embraced but where the barriers are broken down. It is open, accepting and joyful. It respects and nurtures mutuality of ministry. It acknowledges a variety of cultural expressions of the one faith.
- *Sharing of All Resources*: A multicultural church is able to share everything including cultural richness as well as property and resources (power). It shares each other's language, values and customs. When we share property and resources well, feelings of racial discrimination or nationalistic superiority will be overcome.
- *Equal Participation in Decision Making*: A multicultural church is like a table, a round table. At a round table, people can participate as

⁵⁸⁷ Brown, in Yoo, Building Bridges, p.6.

equals. No new migrant member should have to feel like a guest in such a church. It is a place where we are welcomed as we are. There is cultural sensitivity in decision making where the minority ethnic groups are consulted and decisions are not solely made according to western value systems. People whose mother tongue is not English are often diffident about contributing to a debate in synod or presbytery meetings, but this should not prevent their experiences and views being sought more extensively in the whole life of the church.

Equal participation also means sharing of responsibilities as a congregation and individual members. Each group needs to endeavour to fulfil their tasks according to their capacity and capability, regardless of when they joined or the cultures from which they came.

- *Inclusiveness*: A multicultural church is inclusive of all peoples and cultures, women and men, young and old. It affirms different cultural groups worshipping in their own language or operating in their own way. But all congregations also need to contact with the wider church, striving to work together as one body in Christ. It sometimes involves distinguishing between what is cultural and what is faith. It holds an ecumenical perspective that seeks the unity of all those who bear the name Christian.
- *Being a Sign of Hope and Reconciliation*: A multicultural church is a sign of hope within the community and particularly to those who are pushed to its fringes. It actively works for the reconciliation or restoration of different individuals or groups who are otherwise alienated from each other. It binds all people together in the name of love. It is a church that works for justice and peace for all. In this area a multicultural church takes its prophetic task seriously.
- *Growing in Mission and Evangelism*: A multicultural church reaches out to people of different cultures with the clear message of the gospel of Jesus, proclaiming it joyfully, sharing its life with them and serving them. While maintaining the need to take a strong role in global mission, it also sees the need for an effective evangelism in Australia, which is becoming racially, religiously and culturally a microcosm of the world.
Many people such as Asian students, refugees from Asia, Africa and Eastern Europe and others are arriving here to reside. These people are in need of jobs, housing, language training, social links, community integration and spiritual nurture.
- *Accepting and Preparing for Changes*: A multicultural church is not static. It is a church which is able to adjust to the changes of our time and life. A multicultural church is serious about the meaning of changes to prepare for the future. The implications of these changes are enormous. They directly affect structure, mission strategy, administration, and Christian education. As the community

surrounding us is rapidly changing, changes in the church will be inevitable, because the church is an agent to serve the community.⁵⁸⁸

In the light of both the 1985 Multicultural Declaration and the 1996 Vision of a Multicultural Church, there can be no doubting the seriousness with which the UCA takes its call to be a multicultural church. Together they demonstrate “an awareness of the multicultural nature of the Australian community which the Uniting Church was called to serve, as well as the experiences of exclusion and alienation felt by those members of the Uniting Church from backgrounds other than Anglo-Saxon.”⁵⁸⁹ In the subsequent years these two documents have helped shape the way the denomination responded to the increasing cultural and religious diversity taking place in the Australian society.

By the early twenty first century, several more multicultural projects and initiatives were in place to support the denomination’s effort at becoming a multicultural church and living out the multicultural vision so eloquently articulated in these two statements. These include “Assembly Guidelines on Sharing Property; Biennial National Conferences; Translation of additional key documents into other languages including the Basis of Union, Constitution, and Code of Ethics; Orientation Programs for new ministers and congregations into

⁵⁸⁸ S, Yoo-Crowe, ed., The Vision of a Multicultural Church, (Sydney: National Assembly UCA, 1998), pp.15-17.

⁵⁸⁹ Bos & Thompson, Theology for Pilgrims, p. 619.

the UCA; Annual Celebration of One Great Sunday of Sharing; Courses and Workshops on cross-cultural relationships and racism awareness; periodical National Multicultural Ministry Consultations.”⁵⁹⁰

A third national multicultural ministry consultation was held in 2003 out of which report four key areas of multicultural ministry focus were highlighted and affirmed: “Cross-cultural Theology and Education; Uniting National Conferences; Intentional Multicultural Ministry, and Second Generation.”⁵⁹¹ These four specific areas of work were set up as working groups based in different synods of the UCA, to assist and collaborate with the Assembly staff and committee for multicultural ministry in supporting, developing, and growing the denomination’s capacity to address the needs in these areas in its life and witness.

The fourth national multicultural ministry consultation in 2006 together with the 11th Assembly in that same year affirmed the UCA’s renewed commitment to being a multicultural and cross-cultural community encompassed in the vision statement *A Church for All God’s People*:

Within the life of our nation we will: recognise the place of Australia’s first peoples and work for reconciliation; reflect the love of Christ for all people; contribute to building an inclusive Australian society; seek to

⁵⁹⁰ UCA Multicultural Ministry Report to 10th Assembly, 2003, para.3.1-3.13
<<http://assembly.uca.org.au/images/stories/archive/mcm/stories/Reports/mcmreport10thassembly.pdf>>
(September 2012).

⁵⁹¹ UCA Multicultural Ministry, Walking Together: National Consultation on Cross Cultural Ministry, (Sydney: National Assembly Multicultural Ministry, 2003), pp.124-126.

minister effectively within a culturally diverse society and build bridges with people of different cultures and faiths

As a welcoming community we will: be open to receive from one another, sharing the hospitality of Christ; affirm and celebrate cultural diversity, and let that diversity be a resource for ministry; overcome prejudice and racism and develop a spirituality of trust, respect and mutuality; encourage all members to embark on a journey of cross-cultural learning.

As a community made up of people from many different backgrounds and cultures we will: provide space for people from different cultural groups to maintain language and cultural patterns and traditions that are life giving; reflect ethnic diversity in a visible way in our worship, life and leadership; encourage people from different backgrounds to take up their place in the life of the church and contribute to its life; seek to meet the needs of our diverse membership and develop policies and processes to assist the full participation of all members.

As a community at mission we will: encourage the development of culturally diverse congregations; form, develop and train people for ministry in cross-cultural settings; ensure equality and partnership in the sharing of resources so that property is a resource for the ministry and mission of the whole people of God; utilise the gifts of all of God's people; be open to the transformation which the Spirit brings! ⁵⁹²

This multicultural affirmation was accompanied by a prayer that expressed the vision simply but profoundly:

God our Creator, you brought this Uniting Church into being
You have called us to be your diverse and multi-coloured people
Show us how to value one another as those made in your image

Christ Jesus
You reached out across the barriers that divided Jews, Samaritans
and Romans,
Enable us to cross the barriers that separate us from one another

Holy Spirit,
You are the Giver of Unity,
Unite your people in love that we may be a community of justice,
love and reconciliation - A Church for all God's People. Amen. ⁵⁹³

⁵⁹² UCA Assembly Standing Committee Minutes, 2006, Appendix C, para.06.14.04.

<<http://assembly.uca.org.au/images/assemblies/minutes11thassembly06.pdf>>(September 2012).

⁵⁹³ UCA Assembly Standing Committee Minutes, 2006, Appendix C para.06.14.04.

Significantly, these three multicultural vision statements (1985, 1996, 2006) actually reveal not only the depth of theological and missional thinking and reflection invested in its multicultural calling, but they also signal current key concerns and future directions and needs in the denomination's multicultural journey. Of course there are structural and administrative issues equally critical to the development and growth of the multicultural church, and to the overall goal of transforming vision and aspiration to reality and practice.

Indeed, these are precisely the issues that necessitate the existence of multicultural ministry in the life of the church. On that note, the UCA's practical commitment to becoming a multicultural church and to its multicultural calling is affirmed by its continuing support for an Assembly staff person specifically tasked to give focus to this critical area of mission and ministry in its life from 1986 to this day.⁵⁹⁴ An accompanying national reference group was appointed to support the staff and the work.⁵⁹⁵ So it is to be remembered that the progress made in the UCA's multicultural journey over the years could not have happened without the leading hand and active support of the denomination's multicultural ministry programme, at both national and

⁵⁹⁴ Seongja Yoo-Crowe served in that role for fourteen years from 1986 to 2000 and she made a huge impact in multicultural ministry both in the UCA as well as in the world church. Her successor served for six years and the current staff has been in the role since 2007. H. Richmond & M D Yang (eds.), Crossing Borders: Shaping Faith, Ministry and Identity in Multicultural Australia, (Sydney: UCA Assembly & NSW Board of Mission, 2006), p.320.

⁵⁹⁵ UCA Multicultural Ministry, Walking Together, p.124.

state levels. Some of the key projects and initiatives have already been mentioned above. But the question remains regarding the kind of impact the denomination's theological commitment to the multicultural vision really makes in its whole life and witness.

From Multicultural to Cross-cultural

In response to this question, some key recurring themes in the three vision statements above need a closer look. They indicate specific areas of concern in the denomination's multicultural journey that also shape its ongoing multicultural priorities. A recurring theme in all three statements is to do with equal participation and sharing of power in decision making processes; another is concern for just sharing of resources and access to property; a third is the ongoing tension between difference and unity or oneness; and the final recurring theme is the concern over the relationship between Indigenous and multicultural interests. Certainly, there are other equally significant issues mentioned such as theological education, ministerial formation and liturgical practices, as well as racism and ethnocentrism.

All these multicultural issues are framed in theological terms reflecting an understanding and commitment to the multicultural vision as integral to the mission of the church as the Body of Christ. But the recurring concern over power sharing, property and resources, unity in

diversity, and Indigenous relations really expose a basic but fundamental problem that the denomination has been wrestling with since the 1985 declaration. And the problem is simply to do with how to effectively translate vision and aspiration into practice. How to move beyond the eloquent theological statements to reality and difference-making action?

While the UCA welcomed the development and growth of multicultural congregations and churches, its expressed interest and support of mono-cultural or mono-ethnic churches was always very strong. In reference to “some denominations that have resisted having mono-ethnic congregations”, John Mavor a former President of the UCA stated:

That is not the stance the Uniting Church has taken. The Uniting Church view is that it is appropriate to have mono-ethnic congregations if having such congregations helps people to be more effective in their witness, service and worship. Such congregations help recently arrived immigrants to adjust to Australian society. They are also centres where the second and third generations can learn the language of their parents and be exposed to some elements of the culture of the country from which their forebears came.⁵⁹⁶

First generation migrants also find comfort and a sense of security in mono-cultural ecclesial settings as paragraph seven of the 1985 declaration recognises. Needless to say, these are all good reasons for

⁵⁹⁶ Note that *mono-ethnic* and *mono-cultural* are used interchangeably in the study to refer to a church or group or congregation in which one culture is dominant in all that the community does and in how it lives and witnesses. J., Mavor, “God Will Continue to Guide Them”, in S. Yoo et al (eds), Building Bridges, p.3.

encouraging monocultural churches and congregations (both Anglo and minority ethnic) to grow. Of course the theory is that each monocultural group would make every effort to connect and interact with the other groups and churches in the community. But the reality is more in line with Richmond and Yang's contention that "we can live in a multicultural society without being cross-cultural."⁵⁹⁷ This statement really speaks to an underlying passivity that has always been a threat to multiculturalism. It is known in other contexts as *parallel lives* or *live and let live* multiculturalism.⁵⁹⁸ This approach to multicultural church contrasts that of the URC in the UK where from the outset the clear vision and goal was to grow culturally mixed communities of Christ.

Clearly, the study would have concerns about this monocultural ecclesial model as an approach to being church where the calling is to be a multicultural and inclusive *ecclesia*. It certainly does not reflect an understanding of multiculturalism that the study would subscribe to. Nevertheless, in this situation with the absence of clear rationale to motivate social interaction, coupled with the lack of organizational or structural will and/or expectation, groups and churches already stretched by other demands have no incentive to make the effort to reach beyond their comfort zones. Such natural human inclination is

⁵⁹⁷ Richmond & Yang (eds.), *Crossing Borders*, p.12.

⁵⁹⁸ In chapter one of the study I discuss detractors of multiculturalism who reject it on the basis that it promotes parallel lives. In chapter two I refer to the tendency to 'live and let live' as a way some churches in Europe deal with cultural diversity.

only intensified when there is seen to be strong external organisational support for it, and of course when there are good internal reasons for it as expressed by Mavor above. But ultimately, there are question marks about how effective a witness to Christ's inclusive mission and ministry can a monocultural church make.

Inevitably, convenience and comfort become masked as valuing difference and distinctness. Worse still, prejudice and ignorance are allowed to thrive in the name of cultural sensitivity. And in the UCA experience, what really is a corrupt and misinformed notion of multiculturalism has been allowed to flourish in the form of rampant and entrenched monoculturalism in both minority and majority settings! What was really meant to be just one (and a transitional model at that) of several models of being a multicultural church has multiplied as the predominant, and in many cases the only model, for being church.⁵⁹⁹

So the multicultural vision of equal participation in decision making processes and the just sharing of power continue to be remote from reality. The multicultural vision of equal access to resources has instead grown into a Mount Everest of a problem in the form of competition for property usage. There is very little incentive for unity

⁵⁹⁹ S. Yoo, "Diversity in Formation: Different Styles of Multi-ethnic Congregations and Parishes", in S. Yoo et al (eds.), Building Bridges: Sharing Life and Faith in a Multicultural Church , (Sydney: UCA National Mission and Evangelism Committee, 1993), pp.8-10.

in diversity when separate silo communities believe themselves fulfilled in their insularity. A strong emphasis on the multicultural ecclesial vision of growing and developing churches that are truly culturally mixed would have been the more difficult thing to do. But that is the model most consistent with the New Testament ecclesial vision and that could have served the denomination's commitment to its multicultural calling well in the long term. Recognition of the real significance of truly cultural mixed churches came rather late. According to Richmond and Yang, "a new area emerging, previously not given much attention, is the growth of multicultural congregations."⁶⁰⁰

In the meantime, entrenched monoculturalism is not naturally predisposed to providing spaces and opportunities conducive to mutual understanding, learning and respect which are basic building blocks for equal participation in decision making and power sharing. Rampant monoculturalism fosters and engenders hostility and conflict arising out of monocultural congregations and churches competing for property usage and access to resources.

The alternative multicultural image is that of diverse peoples together worshipping and witnessing as one community that belong together and share everything together. That multicultural image presupposes

⁶⁰⁰ Richmond & Yang (eds.), Crossing Borders, p.12.

the commitment of people from different backgrounds to willingly engage their differences however difficult because they value equality, justice, and mutual recognition as gospel imperatives for how Christ's body must live.

Well into the twenty first century, the UCA's multicultural journey seems to have encountered a road block in monoculturalism. Predictably, many would place the blame for the road block squarely on the multicultural doorstep because there continues to exist a prevailing misconception that multiculturalism actually promotes separatist and parallel lives. This is a misconception that the study has rejected and continues to challenge. As a multicultural practitioner it is my experience that entrenched monoculturalism often tends to undermine multiculturalism in its true sense. I am confronted daily by the monocultural mindset that does not have the imagination to create space for mutual capacity building in bi-cultural and cross-cultural competency; that undermines effective multicultural leadership development especially for second and third generation minority ethnic youth; that is incapable of making space at the table for different others to take their place. And monoculturalism combined with cultural dominance and supremacy is the biggest obstacle to true

multiculturalism, racial justice and the “development of collective ecclesial identity”.⁶⁰¹

Over twenty five years since its multicultural declaration, the leadership of the UCA right across the board is still predominantly Anglo in spite of the increasingly visible diversity of its membership. In the area of theological education, it is true that “the face of theology” in the UCA has changed dramatically over the past two decades, especially with the unprecedented increase in the number of theological students from diverse cultural backgrounds enrolled at theological seminaries such as the United Theological College in Sydney.⁶⁰²

However, UCA theological institutions are still rather hesitant to make the necessary “radical change in its structure, staff and programs” in order to adequately equip candidates for ministry in a multicultural society and world.⁶⁰³ There is also in theological education and ministerial training and formation the ongoing tension between the need to be contextually rooted and relevant without compromising the rigorous “desire to wrestle with how Christian identity is formed and

⁶⁰¹ Bos & Thompson (eds.), Theology for Pilgrims, p.621.

⁶⁰² C. Pearson, “The Face of Theology”, in Richmond & Yang (eds.), Crossing Borders, (Sydney: UCA Assembly & NSW Board of Mission, 2006), p.216.

⁶⁰³ Jung Y. Lee, Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), p.138.

how the Gospel might indeed call into question the practices of the cultures to which we belong.”⁶⁰⁴

In response to this road block, Richmond and Yang have followed what seem to be a collective shift along the cultural diversity spectrum from multicultural to cross-cultural mission and ministry. Apparently, this is not a replacement of, but a continuation into, a deeper level of multicultural engagement. The thinking is that since “multicultural conveys the presence of a multiplicity of cultures; cross-cultural reminds us that active interaction is needed.”⁶⁰⁵ The way forward then is via a “cross-cultural paradigm” that is rooted in the “biblical mandate to cross cultures.”⁶⁰⁶ They write:

A cross-cultural paradigm invites all of us to travel beyond our cultural boundaries to discover new understandings of God and what it means to be God’s people. It is a paradigm that has no centre or periphery but is focused on the crossing journey that is needed. And for us as Christians there is an added meaning because it is the cross of Christ that makes it possible for us to cross over to one another.⁶⁰⁷

This paradigm shift explains the Assembly Standing Committee’s decision in 2005 to change the name of the ministry from Multicultural Ministry to Multicultural and Cross-cultural Ministry.⁶⁰⁸ This cross-cultural paradigm is critically important for changing a mindset in the

⁶⁰⁴ Pearson, Crossing Borders, p.205.

⁶⁰⁵ Richmond & Yang (eds.), Crossing Borders, p.11.

⁶⁰⁶ Richmond & Yang, p. 11.

⁶⁰⁷ Richmond & Yang, p. 11.

⁶⁰⁸ Assembly Standing Committee Minutes 2005, para. 05.35.02

<<http://assembly.uca.org.au/images/assemblies/minutes11thassembly06.pdf>>(September 2012).

UCA that has assumed multiculturalism to be about different monocultural ecclesial formations existing under the one institutional umbrella called the UCA.

It is significant to note also that the underlying tension between multicultural and cross-cultural here echoes the tension between multicultural ministry and racial justice in the URC context discussed in chapter three. The presenting issues are similar but with different language and terms being used. Implicit in the use of *cultural* as opposed to *racial* language is the prevailing discomfort associated with the more confrontational language of 'race' and racism. In this case, it could be said that *crossing-culture* has similar confrontational connotations to *racial dynamics and relations*.

Multiculturalism and Indigenous Relations

A major recurring concern in the multicultural journey of the UCA is the question regarding the implications of *Multicultural Australia* for *Indigenous Australia*. This question has exposed "inherent problems" in the "form of multiculturalism" Australia has embraced.⁶⁰⁹ Australian multiculturalism seems to prioritise the relationship between "new arrivals and the dominant Anglo culture which leaves Aboriginal people

⁶⁰⁹H. Richmond, "Struggles in Multicultural Ministry", in S. Yoo-Crowe & C. Crowe (eds), Second International Network Forum on Multicultural Ministry, (Sydney: INFORM, 2002), p.19.

out or diminishes their position to just one of the 200 or so communities.”⁶¹⁰ Recognition of the rightful place of the Aboriginal people in the society continues to be an issue of contention and debate within dominant Anglo cultural circles which influence the perception recent and newly arrived migrants have of Aboriginal Australians. As Richmond affirmed after a conversation with a newly arrived migrant who spoke negatively about Indigenous Australians:

It struck me that it is very possible for people to migrate to Australia and not be exposed to the real history of this country; but be incorporated into the often racist attitudes of society.⁶¹¹

The multicultural ecclesial vision presupposes the centrality of Aboriginal culture and spirituality to achieving true multicultural inclusiveness in the church and the society. Richmond is clear that:

No picture of Australia’s cultural diversity can be complete without naming the contribution of Indigenous people but Australia’s multiculturalism remains fundamentally flawed until there will be meaningful reconciliation between Indigenous and all other Australians.⁶¹²

Bernard Clarke et al stress the demand for a qualitatively different approach to the original peoples of Australia – an approach that recognises their prior occupancy of the land.⁶¹³ It is fair to say that the majority of Australians today do not understand that for many Aboriginal Australians immigration can be seen as part of the “ongoing

⁶¹⁰ Richmond, Second International, p.19.

⁶¹¹ Richmond, Second International, p. 19.

⁶¹² *ibid.*

⁶¹³ Bernard Clarke et al, “Multiculturalism and the Uniting Church”, in V Hayes (ed), Religion and Multiculturalism in Australia, (Adelaide: AASR, 1992), p.227.

invasion of their land for they have never been consulted or recognized as conversational partners.”⁶¹⁴

In the context of the UCA, the debate over the new Preamble to its Constitution which was adopted by the 12th National Assembly in 2009 had brought into focus again the issue of the “disconnection between First Peoples and Multicultural Ministry.”⁶¹⁵ In 2006 William Emilsen highlighted the “tension between indigenous and multicultural perspectives” in terms of the two communities operating “in parallel worlds.”⁶¹⁶ Now with the Preamble debate the issue is brought to the forefront again. As Tahaafe-Williams describes it, multicultural ministry in the UCA is “defined, understood and shaped in terms of the needs and struggles of more recently arrived migrants” which has the double impact of distancing “both the dominant Anglo culture and the Aboriginal culture from identifying with and owning the concept in both theory and practice.”⁶¹⁷

The new Preamble included proposals from the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) that address the relationship between the Indigenous peoples and God, the church, and the history of invasion. Perhaps not surprisingly, these proposals had attracted

⁶¹⁴ Richmond, Second International, p. 19.

⁶¹⁵ K. Tahaafe-Williams, “A Multicultural Perspective on the New Preamble”, in C. Budden (ed), Uniting Church Studies 16.1 (June 2010): 49-57.

⁶¹⁶ W. Emilsen, “The Interdependence of Indigenous and Multicultural Christian Perspectives: A Fading Vision?” in Richmond & Yang (eds.), Crossing Borders, pp.240-251.

⁶¹⁷ Tahaafe-Williams, in Uniting Church Studies, p.52.

some tension and painful debates around the church and at the Assembly itself. The critical significance of the new Preamble according to Chris Budden, one of its key proponents, is that it specifically seeks to articulate with integrity what it means “to be this Uniting Church *in Australia*.”⁶¹⁸ Put another way, the new Preamble is an official recognition of the fact that “the most significant and defining mark of what it means to be Australian is that we live on land that was and is Aboriginal land and that the critical relationship in this land is the relationship between First and Second Peoples.”⁶¹⁹ Budden defines Second People as people who “live on another’s land, not as guests but invaders.”⁶²⁰

From a multicultural perspective the naming of First and Second Peoples in the Preamble is significant. It recognises that Australia comprises of “those who were already here and those who migrated here [and] that the process of immigration occurred without the invitation of the Indigenous owners.”⁶²¹ It follows then that the First people require and deserve “a special and unique position in our political and theological discourses” and agendas.⁶²² In fact, as Bernard et al argued the UCA in establishing the UAICC in the first

⁶¹⁸ C. Budden, “Introduction: Exploring the Implications of the new Preamble”, Uniting Church Studies 16.1 (June 2010): 1-5.

⁶¹⁹ Budden, Uniting Church Studies, p. 2.

⁶²⁰ C. Budden, Following Jesus in Invaded Space: Doing Theology on Aboriginal Land, (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2009), p.4.

⁶²¹ Richmond, Second International, p. 19.

⁶²² Tahaafe-Williams, Uniting Church Studies, p. 52.

place has exhibited a commitment to empowering its Aboriginal and Islander membership to “control their own life within the UCA.”⁶²³

For all Second peoples, and in particular those of us newly arrived minority ethnic migrants, this is an opportunity to seriously consider what it means to be “living in invaded space.”⁶²⁴ As Budden explains, this is not the same thing as my hyphenated dual identity as Tongan-Australian, rather this is about understanding my “identity within colonial invasion” as a Tongan-Australian on “Indigenous, invaded space.”⁶²⁵ This is a critical step in enabling Indigenous Australians to recognize themselves and their central role in a multicultural Australia.

Recognizing the significance of this issue the 1985 Multicultural Declaration included “covenant with Indigenous people” as a key multicultural direction.⁶²⁶ This committed the UCA to “work for justice and right relationships with Aboriginal and Islander people” as a multicultural priority.⁶²⁷ Certainly, the credibility of the UCA’s commitment to God’s multicultural vision depends on this.

For the newly arrived Second people, this multicultural commitment to seek just and right relationships with the First people has a special

⁶²³ Bernard et al, in Hayes Religion and Multiculturalism, p.227.

⁶²⁴ *ibid.*

⁶²⁵ Budden, Following Jesus, p.4.

⁶²⁶ Richmond & Yang (eds.), Crossing Borders, p.9.

⁶²⁷ *ibid.*

significance. We cannot deny “the fact that we do have a white European/Anglo dominant culture” in the church and society “against which minorities need to assert their rights and existence.”⁶²⁸ The point is we often get so caught up in “becoming established in a new land” and as victims of racial subjugation ourselves that we are blind or simply ignore the ongoing oppression of Aboriginal people.⁶²⁹

Unfortunately, the status of victim is no excuse for collusion in another’s suffering and the specific history of Aboriginal people and culture in this country means that we prioritise “their need for justice before any other multicultural demands or expectations.”⁶³⁰ As a minority ethnic Christian and member of the UCA, this for me involves honest reflection about how to “reconcile my Christian faith and my commitment to racial justice and multicultural inclusion with the fact that I am complicit in the ongoing invasion and continuing dislocation and dispossession of the First peoples of this land.”⁶³¹ This is a challenge for all Second people but it is the very least that we can do.

Without denying the continuing existence of the challenges to reconciliation with Aboriginal people, the UCA continues to strive to be faithful to its commitment to being a multicultural church that fully recognises the fundamental and indispensable part of Indigenous

⁶²⁸ Tahaafe-Williams, in Uniting Church Studies, p. 53.

⁶²⁹ Richmond & Yang (eds.), Crossing Borders, p. 9.

⁶³⁰ Tahaafe-Williams, Uniting Church Studies, p. 53.

⁶³¹ Tahaafe-Williams, Uniting Church Studies, p.52.

Australians in it. In 2005 the National Multicultural Reference Committee resolved to acknowledge the “unique place of Indigenous people and Indigenous spirituality in God’s creative plan for the land we call Australia” and to work towards ensuring that “the faith and spirituality of Indigenous people can truly inform and shape who we are as the Uniting Church.”⁶³² It further made the commitment to:

Shed illusions and misinformation and educate ourselves and our communities regarding the history and experience of Indigenous people in this land; affirm and acknowledge the struggles of Indigenous people and their unique place in this land and in our church; and be open to learn and be transformed through our relationships with Indigenous people.⁶³³

Concluding Remarks

The UCA’s aspiration to being a multicultural church is not in dispute. Its sincere response and commitment to being a church in which right relationships of justice and mutuality exist between First people and Second people is not in dispute. But in almost thirty years after it made the bold declaration that it is a multicultural church, there are still big gaps between its multicultural aspirations and its multicultural practice. The changes as demonstrated by the new Preamble debate have been incremental. Ironically, the most radical and historical change that has happened in its multicultural journey in the last decade has been the 2011 Inauguration of a monocultural Korean

⁶³² Richmond & Yang (eds.), *Crossing Borders*, p. 10.

⁶³³ *ibid.*

Presbytery in the Synod of NSW and the ACT. That is, the Synod agreed to recognize and endorse a culturally specific Presbytery as opposed to the traditional/usual geographical Presbyteries. Several concerns need addressing: Is this development really multicultural progress or is it more like regression into monoculturalism? How is such a development going to encourage the UCA's diverse membership to engage the new paradigm of cross-culturalism? Is such a monocultural setting really going to help Second people Koreans witness more effectively to the UCA's call to being a truly multicultural community of Christ? These are just some of the ongoing issues the UCA must wrestle with as it strives to make real its aspirations to being a multicultural church of Christ.

Obviously multicultural ministry in the UCA still has a huge amount of work to do. Multicultural progress in the UCA has been slow, given that it was the star member of the World Council of Churches that single-handedly brought the vision of multicultural ministry and church to the attention of WCC and the World Church at Bahia, Brazil in 1996. Monocultural ecclesial witness and practice continue to be pervasive in how it is being church. Nevertheless, the case remains true that multicultural ministry is still the best available tool for bringing more significant multicultural change to the life and witness of this already vibrantly multicultural church.

We now turn to the United Church of Canada to get a snapshot of how that Church has responded to the multicultural ecclesial vision and how it might be progressing in its aspirations to be a multicultural church.

Comparative Study **The United Church of Canada is an Intercultural Church!**

The United Church of Canada (UCC) began its journey as a union of Canadian Methodists, Congregationalists, Presbyterians, and the Council of Local Union Churches in 1925, fifty-seven years before the Uniting Church in Australia. From the outset the UCC was open to being shaped by the “visions people of diverse cultural heritages had for the UCC” as it strived to be an expression of the multicultural body of Christ in the Canadian context.⁶³⁴ In other words, there was always a spirit of openness to listen to the culturally diverse voices in the community and to hear their needs, and in response a willingness to try to develop “policies relevant to peoples of diverse cultural heritages.”⁶³⁵

This is precisely the kind of sensitive listening and hearing that is reflected in the denomination’s shift from *ethnic* ministries to *intercultural* ministries. This is clearly a significant development in the

⁶³⁴ H. Cho, “We Are Not Alone: Historical Journey of the United Church of Canada’s Response to Become an Intercultural Church”, International Review of Mission 100.1(392) (April 2011): 48-61.

⁶³⁵ Cho, International Review: 48.

UCC's multicultural journey thus far which has implications for the future. Hence our focus here on the denomination's intercultural vision and commitment. The years 2006 and 2012 are very crucial points in the denomination's intercultural growth and the task is to try to understand what motivated the intercultural vision and what implications they have for the vision of being a truly multicultural/intercultural UCC.

From Multicultural to Intercultural

In recognition of the fact that "demographic and cultural transformations in Canadian society have continued to escalate dramatically" in the past decade and that the Church has not been able to address those changes adequately, a Re-visioning Task Group was appointed to initiate a process to reflect on a transformative vision for the whole church.⁶³⁶ That group reported to the 39th General Council in 2006 encouraging the Church that "in the company of God and one another, our community can be transformative" and that the task now is to respond to God's calling to "transformation as individuals, as communities, and as church, with all the life-giving traditions, faiths, and cultures we have been gifted with for God's mission."⁶³⁷

⁶³⁶ UCC, Ethnic Ministries Re-visioning Task Group, "A Transformative Vision for the United Church of Canada", (August 2006).

<http://www.united-church.ca/files/organisation/gc39/workbook1_commissions.pdf> (September 2012).

⁶³⁷ *ibid.*

It was felt that a new approach was needed to address the demands of a postmodern and pluralistic twenty first century. The Task Group called for a new “intercultural inclusivity that is a celebration of wholeness of life; one that also includes pain and suffering, contradictions, and mutual care for the fragility of trust and respect.”⁶³⁸ The implication is that while useful for its time, the multiculturalism exemplified by the 1971 Federal Policy was no longer useful as it “does not explain racism or its role in preventing equal participation in society by racialized groups.”⁶³⁹ Loraine MacKenzie Shepherd discusses how this challenge in the wider Canadian society is mirrored within the churches so that a “new vision that embraces the growing diversity” in contemporary Canadian society is urgently needed.⁶⁴⁰

The 39th General Council responded by declaring the UCC to be committed to becoming an “intercultural church” showing a willingness to commit to transforming itself “into a space where new paradigms of mutuality, decolonization, polycentric power and cultures, and openness to God’s possibilities are practiced.”⁶⁴¹

⁶³⁸ Ethnic Ministries Re-visioning Task Group, “A Transformative Vision for the United Church of Canada”, (August 2006).

<http://www.united-church.ca/files/organisation/gc39/workbook1_commissions.pdf> (September 2012).

⁶³⁹ Ethnic Ministries Task Group, “A Transformative Vision”, (August 2006)

⁶⁴⁰ L. M. Shepherd, “Church of the Margins: A Call to Solidarity”, in Schweitzer & Simon (eds), *Intersecting Voices*, p.136.

<http://www.united-church.ca/files/organisation/gc39/workbook1_commissions.pdf> (September 2012).

Although the vision puts emphasis on intercultural church, it is clear that the underlying motivation and concern is racial justice. That is, the intercultural vision promotes racial justice as the only “firm foundation” for an intercultural church.⁶⁴² To be sure, the UCC’s intercultural approach in prioritizing racial justice mirrors the URC experience as well. In a sense, both churches recognize the centrality of racial justice to the multicultural/intercultural vision, and they also both acknowledge their ongoing journey “towards the fullness of being the community of the children of God.”⁶⁴³

Notably, the intercultural vision promotes support for “ethno-specific or language-specific congregations as well as culturally diverse congregations” acknowledging that given the cultural diversity in the society “a variety of congregational models are needed to meet the challenge of transformation and to help congregations move towards becoming mutually welcoming, anti-racist, intercultural communities.”⁶⁴⁴ Again, the UCC intercultural approach is quite similar to the URC’s experience where the ultimate vision is the truly multicultural/intercultural *ecclesia*, but recognizing that different

⁶⁴¹ Ethnic Ministries, <http://www.united-church.ca/files/organisation/gc39/workbook1_commissions.pdf> (September 2012).

⁶⁴² Ethnic Ministries, <http://www.united-church.ca/files/organisation/gc39/workbook1_commissions.pdf> (September 2012).

⁶⁴³ WCC, Transformative Justice: Being Church and Overcoming Racism, (Geneva: WCC, 2004).

⁶⁴⁴ Ethnic Ministries, <http://www.united-church.ca/files/organisation/gc39/workbook1_commissions.pdf> (September 2012).

models including the mono-cultural church may be necessary but as a stepping stone to the ultimate multicultural goal.

Given the significance of the *Intercultural Vision* for the UCC's multicultural development, an extract of that vision statement is included here:

We are the living body of Christ—
a faithful call to be church and join Christ's mission in love and compassion;

We are dying in the body of Christ—
to exclusivity that creates and maintains alienation, barriers and obstacles to access for racial and ethnic minorities in the church;

We are the body of Christ rising on Native land, rising in humbling respect for First Peoples—
to a resurrection hope for respectful diversity, differences, and openness to God doing a new thing in The United Church of Canada.

The time has come for the United Church to be seriously challenged by the potential gifts of Canadian demographic trends and to revisit the challenge of the 1994 theological statement made by the Feasibility Task Group on Ethnic Ministries:

We, the peoples of racial and ethnic minorities within The United Church of Canada, come from diverse civilizations, birth places, cultures, languages, faiths, and life contexts.

We are sojourners who experience exodus and exile ... continue to be nameless ... where God has different names ... where cultural diversity is not yet a reality.

*The Church is not whole; the Church is broken. This is sin.
We, the racial and ethnic minorities of The United Church of Canada invite the whole church to join us as we pursue this vision.*

It is a theological challenge of the sinned against, the dominated over; not a theology of the sinner, the dominator.
It is a theology from the underside; a theology of mutual invitation.

The time has come to **live** the vision, not simply pursue it.

*The Gospel calls us all to transformation. My culture is not exempt.*⁶⁴⁵

Again, the intercultural vision clearly gives priority to relations with the First Nation Peoples of Canada in the same way the the UCA tries to prioritise Indigenous Australians in the multicultural equation. It is also notable that the vision is stated as an invitation from the minority ethnic membership to the rest of the church. So the initiative is clearly coming from the racially and ethnically marginalized. This is a powerful statement.

Another important development in this visioning process was the change in the name of Ethnic Ministries to Intercultural and Diverse Communities in Ministry to reflect its expanded areas of responsibility.⁶⁴⁶ As discussed in Chapter One of the study, the term *minority ethnic* is preferred because it denotes the reality that we are all ethnics, whether we are part of the dominant culture or a member of a minority culture. So the shift from *ethnic* ministries to *intercultural* ministries in the Canadian context implies a desire to move away from the pervasive misconception that what Shepherd calls the Canadian “dominant identity [that is] Caucasian, British,

⁶⁴⁵ Ethnic Ministries Task Group, “ A Transformative Vision”, (August 2006)
<http://www.united-church.ca/files/organisation/gc39/workbook1_commissions.pdf> (September 2012).

⁶⁴⁶ UCC Intercultural Ministries Task Group, “Living into Transformation: Vision for Becoming an Intercultural Church”, (March 2012) The extract used in the study is from Draft 8 of the “Vision” which Adele Halliday, a key staff in Intercultural Ministries and staff resource on the Task Group, had sent me for comments, (October 2011) and which I have since updated.
<<http://www.gc41.ca/sites/default/files/intercultural-ministries.pdf>> (September 2012)

Protestant” is not *ethnic* and that only those from nonwhite western backgrounds are *ethnic*.⁶⁴⁷

That 2006 vision statement led to another task group on intercultural ministries which did more work and reflection on the denomination’s intercultural call resulting in the 2012 *Intercultural Vision Statement* added here:

Intercultural is a call to live together in intentional ways where there is the mutual recognition and understanding of difference through intentional self-examination, relationship building, and equitable access to power; it is also our attempt to respond faithfully to such a call.

God exists in community and we are invited to be in community together. We strive to become an intercultural church to deepen our experiences and understanding of God and of one another. Individually and collectively we see and do everything through the lenses of our cultures: there is no culture-free perspective. Our experiences and understandings are shaped by our cultures and so our understanding of God is limited if we only see God through our own specific cultural lenses.

Since a monocultural lens cannot capture the complexity of God through that singular perspective, it is imperative that we come together in community and together allow each other’s perspective to enrich our understanding of God and each other. As Christians when we come together as Christ’s disciples with our differences and diversity and through the creation of multicultural/intercultural spaces, our understanding of God and our scriptures deepen.

So in the UCC we commit to striving to become an intercultural church to deepen our understanding and experiences of God and one another. Our desire is to create a space where we can sustain our own cultural identities while affirming one another’s.

⁶⁴⁷ Shepherd, in Schweitzer & Simon, *Intersecting Voices*, p.140.

An intercultural church is one that is:

Welcoming. It

- is open, accepting, joyful, and life-giving,
- trusts that God's Spirit opens all to new and different experiences, however challenging, painful, and uncomfortable at times;
- seeks to use inclusive and expansive language in worship and community life, and honours diverse language in policy statements and official declarations;
- maintains a commitment to mutuality, inclusion and radical welcoming as part of the church's mission and ministry.

Relational. It

- affirms, honours, and treasures the God-given differences present in the context of its communities—recognizing that there are a variety of cultural expressions of faith;
- offers a positive vision of community as a whole, with critical engagement within and between cultural perspectives;
- recognizes reciprocal relationships among and between one another, and our responsibilities to live in right relationship with all of Creation;
- strives to become a culturally diverse and multilingual community.

Adaptive. It:

- lives with God's grace enabling it to accept mistakes, and learns and grows from the past;
- opens itself to be vulnerable;
- continually affirms diverse cultural identities to avoid assimilation into dominant cultures;
- is not afraid to engage in transformation of heart, mind, structure and policy—including continually adapting to change when change is called for.

Justice-Seeking. It

- steadfastly and authentically seeks to share resources, redress power imbalances, and challenge systemic injustices, while seeking full and equitable participation of all—both inside, and outside of the church;
- faithfully addresses racism and White privilege;
- recognizes the churches complicity in historic injustices and tries to do things differently;

- commits itself to becoming a globally-minded, inclusive, and justice-seeking community.

Intentional. It

- seeks to be enriched by different cultural perspectives, and knows that what we hold in common does not deny difference;
- creates spaces for courageous conversations;
- proactively cultivates diverse leadership, with a particular emphasis on cultural communities that have been historically minoritized and underrepresented;
- engages in self-examination, life-long learning, and reflection through ongoing education, training, consultation, monitoring and evaluation of its intercultural engagement.

Missional. It

- seeks to discern, acknowledge and embody biblical and theological bases for becoming an intercultural church;
- affirms that the God of mission has a church in the world, and that we—in all our differences—are active participants in God’s mission.⁶⁴⁸

Undoubtedly, the UCC took very seriously its commitment in 2006 to become an intercultural church. Then *intercultural* was understood as “mutually reciprocal relationships among and between cultures.”⁶⁴⁹ So reciprocity figures prominently in intercultural relations which in Shepherd’s terms she calls it “relationships of solidarity”.⁶⁵⁰ Interestingly, Shepherd argues that in the multicultural Canadian context a “charity model of relationships” had been dominant and that as churches begin to take seriously the intercultural vision, the call is to relationships of solidarity.

⁶⁴⁸ Intercultural Ministries Task Group, “Living into Transformation: Vision for Becoming an Intercultural Church”, General Council Executive (March 2012) <<http://www.gc41.ca/sites/default/files/intercultural-ministries.pdf>> (September 2012).

⁶⁴⁹ *ibid.*

⁶⁵⁰ Shepherd in *Intersecting Voices*, p.147.

With the work of the Task Group on Intercultural Ministries, a clear definition of a intercultural church was articulated as “the call to live together in intentional ways that engage in mutual recognition, respect, and understanding of difference; and, through intentional self-examination, relationship building, and equitable access to power, we as the church seek to be fully committed and faithful in our response.”⁶⁵¹

With that more inclusive understanding the Task Group was given the mandate to “assist the United Church in its efforts to become an intercultural and racially just church.”⁶⁵²

The group’s work was quite extensive and it brought its first report to the 2009 General Council. The report signaled that it expected some structural changes as integral to the theological and biblical evaluation the group had made of the UCC’s capacity to fulfil its intercultural calling. The 2009 report was fully expecting the church to take seriously the message that it has to be radically transformed as a church in order for the intercultural vision to become a reality. The UCC then reaffirmed its commitment to become an intercultural church. The Task Group brought its final report to the General Council

⁶⁵¹ Intercultural Ministries Task Group, “Living into Transformation: Vision for Becoming an Intercultural Church”, General Council Executive (March 2012) <<http://www.gc41.ca/sites/default/files/intercultural-ministries.pdf>> (September 2012).

⁶⁵² *ibid.*

Executive in early 2012 with the new expanded vision of an intercultural church.

The 2012 Report is very thorough, covering everything from institutional and structural change to theological transformation to worship and liturgy and more. Cho's account of the history of UCC engagement with cultural diversity since 1971 suggest that while actively engaged on the issue the changes made by the church in the area of racial justice and multicultural inclusion were quite modest.⁶⁵³

Now with the new intercultural vision the Task Group's 2012 report is asking for radical and comprehensive changes in the church, even in the way it is being church. Ultimately, the call to be an intercultural church is seen as a call to be the church as articulated in one of the denomination's faith statements called *A New Creed*:

We are called to be the Church:
to celebrate God's presence,
to live with respect in Creation,
to love and serve others,
to seek justice and resist evil,
to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen,
our judge and our hope.⁶⁵⁴

Though it is early days yet since the new intercultural vision had been adopted, indications of the UCC's commitment to working to make a thorough and radical transformation in response to this vision is clear.

⁶⁵³Cho, *International Review of Mission*, 100.1(392), (April 2011):48-61.

⁶⁵⁴Intercultural Ministries, "Living into Transformation"

<<http://www.gc41.ca/sites/default/files/intercultural-ministries.pdf>> (September 2012).

While most of the report has targeted structural and institutional changes, inevitably these will have an impact on the ground as well.

There is a sense that the intercultural vision is calling the church to open itself up to the Spirit's power to break the barriers that stand in the way of the church becoming truly intercultural, in other words, of becoming truly the church as expressed above. The UCC intercultural journey is really a movement from the multicultural model to the intercultural model. That is, a movement from a notion of multiculturalism that is respectful, accepting, appreciative and patient but which does not require deeper and riskier engagement, to an understanding of intercultural relating that insists on moving deeper into relationships of mutuality and interdependence. This deeper movement is supposed to be powered by the Spirit working to remove the barrier of racism that undermines mutuality and respect.

So at one end of the spectrum there is multiculturalism and at the other end there is interculturalism. In between them is cross-culturalism which promotes active movement to cross cultural barriers with courage into unfamiliar territory where the requirement is to practice respectful listening and the abandoning of presumptions and preconceived prejudices. The UCC experience does not reject any one of these models of relating but embraces them all as valuable for the journey.

The UCC intercultural journey continues. So far the journey has been dynamic and active clearly because intercultural ministry has been the key driver throughout. And there is plenty still for intercultural ministry as an ecclesial program to do. While the vision of a truly inclusive and intercultural church is still remote in the UCC experience, working in partnership and cooperating with the equally dynamic Spirit is probably not a bad idea.

Ecumenical Implications

At this point it would be helpful to explore briefly the ecumenical implications of the multicultural, cross-cultural, and intercultural approaches to building and growing the culturally inclusive church. Interestingly, the two global ecumenical bodies that I have been most actively involved with over the years have responded quite differently to the multicultural reality Christianity and churches are faced with in the twenty first century.

The Council for World Mission, formed in 1977 and formerly known as the London Missionary Society, has thirty one member churches from around the world. In 2004 CWM's Mission Secretary, Jooseop Keum, and the CWM European Region's Mission Enabler, Francis Brien, began a conversation with me on the topic of multicultural ministry

and its increasing significance for international mission bodies such as CWM and CWM Europe. I was then the Secretary for Racial Justice and Multicultural Ministry in the URC which is a member church of both CWM and CWM Europe.

The response from each organization was swift. Recognising the significance of the issue both for their organizations and for their member churches, they immediately wanted to commission a study process to look carefully at the mission and ministry opportunities and challenges multiculturalism provides for the world church and for mission bodies like theirs. We then began to plan a three year series of consultations on the topic gathering multicultural practitioners and scholars from around Europe and from CWM member churches in other parts of the world. In 2005, 2006 and 2008 we held three consultations in Utrecht (Netherlands), Derby (UK), and Basel (Switzerland) respectively which culminated in the publication of a theological education resource entitled *Ministry and Mission in Multicultural Contexts*. The resource was designed to assist CWM and its member churches and ecumenical partners equip ministry agents and candidates for ministry for mission in multicultural twenty first century contexts.

In contrast, the World Council of Churches (WCC) took a lot more persuading. In 1996, I was part of the UCA delegation to the

Commission for World Mission and Evangelism (CWME) conference in Bahia, Brazil. There Seongja Yoo-Crowe, the then National Director for Multicultural Ministry in the UCA, led the motion to raise the profile of multicultural ministry in the world church and to help support multicultural ministry and practitioners in WCC member churches. Appropriately, the theme of that conference was *Called to One Hope – the Gospel in Diverse Cultures*. I was then the Synod of NSW Multicultural staff and had been working closely with Seongja in the UCA. I was also actively involved in the WCC Youth Unit headed by Donna Lee Edwards and its work on racism. I was still mystified by WCC’s slowness to respond to the multicultural issue. The irony is hard to miss here – the theme of the conference emphasised culture and it was dealing with key issues relating to culture, such as indigenous cultural survival and rights and refugee and asylum seekers, but “the conference did not specifically name the multicultural reality facing many churches.”⁶⁵⁵ Yoo-Crowe explains, “... ministry and mission with people of different cultures living together geographically in one community (i.e. multicultural ministry or cross-cultural ministry) was not named nor yet identified as a priority.”⁶⁵⁶ The motion is especially significant for it describes a reality that continues to be the case today using socio-political and cultural as well as theological and biblical arguments that I found persuasive then as I do now:

⁶⁵⁵ S. Yoo-Crowe, “Putting Multicultural Ministry on the Agenda: The History of INFORM, in Richmond & Yang (eds.), *Crossing Borders*, p.25.

⁶⁵⁶ Yoo-Crowe, *Crossing Borders*, p.26.

Centuries of colonialism and enslavement, world wars, massive migration, and racial displacement, along with modern technologies and the global market system, have brought many cultures, many religions and new value systems into many countries, challenging their own old traditions.

Changes are happening as people bring their culture, language and value systems. A number of churches were established by immigrants worshipping in their own languages. At the same time, many immigrants are joining established churches, making them multiracial.

The majority of Western countries have already become multicultural and multiracial, and interfaith issues are emerging as increasingly important. This has meant a change in the religious identity of some countries that traditionally saw themselves as Christian.

Many churches and communities are struggling with conflicts that arise when people with contrasting cultural value systems live side by side. Not only in Western countries but also in Africa and in Asia there are various conflicts and tensions between different peoples, tribes and groups with issues such as imported migrant workers.

At present most countries are multi-racial and their churches are struggling with many different cultural value systems existing in one church/community. The relationship between diversity and unity is the issue needing further clarification; diversity calls for respect for each cultural value system, while unity in Christ transcends all such systems.

For a variety of reasons then, Multicultural Ministry is now a major area of church mission in this century, not that it is altogether new. The early church in Galilee in the ministry of Jesus was multicultural and the ultimate Church to which we are heading, reflected in Revelation 7:9 is also multicultural. We are standing in between these two multicultural churches, serving the multicultural communities of our time. Multicultural ministry is re-emerging as a key issue for the churches in the global context of our times.⁶⁵⁷

⁶⁵⁷ Yoo-Crowe, Crossing Borders, pp.26-27

This was an eloquent and accurate picture of the multicultural reality then and it is still valid now. However, at that conference WCC seem oblivious and did not respond in any proactive way. It was not until the Assembly in Harare, Zimbabwe two years later that some sign of recognition was evident when WCC tasked one of its staff members with responsibility for this ministry area. There was agreement that gatherings of multicultural practitioners would be helpful but WCC did not commit any significant financial resource to this area of ministry. An International Network Forum on Multicultural Ministry (INFORM) was formed and met in Sydney in 1999, then in Thailand in 2002 and 2005 but the network soon fizzled out after that largely due to lack of resources.

In 2009 I organized an international contextual theology conference in Sydney and at that conference I and members from the Presbyterian Church USA, UCC and other ecumenical partners agreed to revive the network. Jooseop Keum, my former CWM colleague, had moved to WCC and I had invited him to give a keynote at the contextual theology conference. With his agreement we were able to re-form the network and called it Ecumenical Network for Multicultural Ministry (ENFORMM) which continues to exist today and which I co-chair with my cohort in the Presbyterian Church USA, Rev Rafaat Girgis.

WCC support however continues to be limited. Understandably there are financial constraints now that did not exist sixteen years ago but that this area of mission and ministry continues to be treated without the primacy and urgency that it needs is difficult to understand. WCC's response to multicultural ministry today is not dissimilar from its response at Bahia 1996. ENFORMM continues to work closely with CWME on the issue but to date WCC has not made multicultural ministry and mission a key agenda in its mission focus and priorities.

At the CWME conference in Manila in March 2012, ENFORMM led by myself and Gerrit Noort from the Protestant Church in the Netherlands had written a paper as a submission to the conference at CWME's request. Though the paper was included in the conference work book, multicultural ministry was not a key agenda at the conference. Migration, on the other hand, was one of the main agenda items. Clearly migration has been a key agenda for WCC but that area of work has been kept quite separate from multicultural ministry. And yet the two issues are inextricably tied together.

As the introduction to our paper stated, "migration and multicultural ministry are core issues for mission, evangelism and ecclesiology for the twenty first century church."⁶⁵⁸ Our paper has since been

⁶⁵⁸ Tahaafe-Williams et al, "Churches in Ecumenical Transition: Toward Multicultural Ministry and Mission", *International Review of Mission* 101.1(394) (April 2012): 170-194.

published in WCC's International Review of Mission but I continue to be mystified that multicultural ministry and church have not been given a higher profile in WCC circles given the significance of the issue for the twenty first century.

Indeed the WCC response to multicultural ministry and mission echoes the responses from most mainline western Christian churches so it should not be so surprising. And they all amount to a rather discouraging message exposing the fundamental inability of twenty first century Christians and churches to live into God's multicultural future now. It seems to me that the prevailing preoccupation with church unity at that level of ecumenical engagement has caused both individual churches and global ecumenical instruments to miss the significant point that it is internal ecumenism rather than organic unity that must be prioritized now. Precisely because the success of future organic unity will depend on how well the Church addresses the internal challenges of cultural and ethnic diversity and difference, and indeed the theological divide between evangelical and liberal, to name two.

Concluding Remarks

The multicultural vision is nowhere better expressed than the UCC intercultural statement that their "desire is to create a space where we

can sustain our own cultural identities while also affirming those of one another.”⁶⁵⁹

This is consistent with the study’s definition of multiculturalism which presupposes vibrant inter-social cross-cultural engagement. And to make desire and vision real, multicultural/cross-cultural/intercultural ministry must continue to be actively supported to carry on doing what it does. Regardless of the seemingly slow and incremental changes witnessed in the various examples discussed, multicultural ministry is still the most effective tool to make multicultural vision into reality.

⁶⁵⁹Intercultural Ministries, “Living into Transformation”
<<http://www.gc41.ca/sites/default/files/intercultural-ministries.pdf>> (September 2012).

Chapter Five

MULTICULTURAL MINISTRY: A TOOL FOR TRANSFORMING ECCLESIAL ASPIRATION INTO ECCLESIAL PRACTICE

This study project was borne out of a desire to find places of uncontested belonging consequent to experiences of racial-ethnic exclusion and alienation in pluralistic western contexts. It is a narrative shaped and driven by an auto-ethnographic approach concerned with understanding socio-political inequality and division as they impact a personal search for belonging, but it is a narrative which ultimately aspires to speak to the human condition and human relationships.

The basic and fundamental query behind this search for belonging is about the human capacity to live together in justice and harmony in the midst of human diversity and difference. The narrative maps a quest for an inclusive community characterized by justice, equal respect and recognition regardless of racial-ethnic background, culture, class, gender, and all other subjectivities. Having navigated

the tricky landscapes of social inequality in civic society primarily through the lens of racial-ethnic and cultural difference, my experiences echo Ratcliffe's assessment that there is lack of evidence to suggest an inclusive community exists in our contemporary world.⁶⁶⁰ The discourses on multiculturalism and the continuing debates over identity, difference, and recognition underline the fundamental and enduring persistence of racism and the elusiveness of racial justice and equality.

As a committed and devoted Christian, my interest shifted to the realm of faith and theology seeking inclusive "liberatory lessons" in Christian ecclesial formations.⁶⁶¹ There the human capacity to cope with difference and diversity is found to be equally lacking. But there is room for hope and access to spiritual resources of transformation within Christian theology which allows for the mystery of God in Christ calling such a community into existence.

Chapter two of the study attempted to give insights into this mystery of the Church through New Testament imagery and the creedal marks. Such conceptions of the Church give room for aspirations to manifest God's kingdom of justice and reconciliation on earth in the midst of

⁶⁶⁰ That is, there is no evidence to suggest that such an inclusive community exists. Ratcliffe, 'Race' Ethnicity and Difference, p. 166.

⁶⁶¹ Faulkner, Places of Redemption, p.3.

human vulnerabilities and frailties.⁶⁶² Such aspirations are rooted in faith and trust in the promise made incarnate in Jesus Christ and willed to all believers that “you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”(Acts 1: 8)

Implicit in that promise is a calling to Christian responsibility and to partnership. Christ was unambiguous about his followers being empowered by the Holy Spirit to take responsibility for carrying on his just and inclusive mission and ministry on earth. His apostles and the first-century churches they built are models of Christ’s culturally inclusive Church. More importantly, they are models of partnership relationships amongst believers, and between believers and the Holy Spirit working together to make real what God in Christ has called into existence. The vision of the multicultural ecclesial formation as a gospel imperative continues to be a beacon of hope. Only now with more acceptance that faithful Christian responsibility and partnership in discipleship, empowered by the Holy Spirit, promises transformative possibilities.

This call to responsibility and partnership in building Christian communities of justice and inclusiveness continues to be fundamental

⁶⁶² I use would prefer ‘kindom’ here recognizing that the ‘kingdom’ language has patriarchal and empire connotations unpalatable for some. The ‘kindom’ language is borrowed from a Tongan cultural kinship arrangement in which interconnectedness and interdependence are absolutely paramount.

to twenty first century Christianity and churches. Years of practice in multicultural ministry has convinced me of the necessity of this ministry as a tool for transforming multicultural aspirations into reality. It is vital as an ecclesial programme essentially tasked with the responsibility of calling the church to account where it fails to live up to Christ's call to multicultural mission and service. It is vital as a buffer against "structural, systemic, institutional, and cultural" forces intent on "ensuring that [the multicultural vision] does not become a reality."⁶⁶³

It is essential at the interface between church intention, policy and practice because it is tasked with a key role in the whole process of helping the church to articulate its intention through vision, shaping that intention into church policy, and then ensuring that the policy is implemented across the whole life and witness of the church. Ecclesial legislation and policy statements by themselves are not automatically wired for action. Moreover, multicultural ministry can facilitate the mobilization and coordination of grassroots community initiatives and efforts for building multicultural and inclusive churches. In short, it has the capacity to empower grassroots "bottom-up" pressure for change.⁶⁶⁴ The combination of institutional will with personnel activism plus grassroots pressure can be very potent indeed.

⁶⁶³ Ratcliffe, *Race Ethnicity and Difference*, p. 166.

⁶⁶⁴ *ibid.*

Multicultural ministry as a programmatic tool is basically the ecclesial version of what Phillips calls a “procedure of political inclusion” which she addresses primarily to concerns of political influence and the need to empower all citizens whose lives are affected by political decisions to be “engaged in the political debate.”⁶⁶⁵ However, as a political tool such a procedure is equally applicable to addressing “status injuries” associated with the socio-political failure to attribute equal worth and recognition to different cultures.⁶⁶⁶ It is necessary because “official redefinition of a country as multi-ethnic and multicultural does not guarantee” socio-political or “economic equality between ethnic groups.”⁶⁶⁷ In the same way, official church statements and declarations that signal a redefinition of ecclesial community as multicultural does not mean automatic equal recognition and participation in church life and witness. Certainly, they have significant symbolic influence and they do indicate more willingness for the “opening up [of] space for the recognition of others.”⁶⁶⁸ However, the case remains that more is needed to ensure that the statement translates into practice and that is the task of multicultural ministry.

To reiterate what I have asserted elsewhere:

⁶⁶⁵ Phillips, Which Equalities Matter?, p.33.

⁶⁶⁶ Phillips, Which Equalities Matter?, p. 89.

⁶⁶⁷ *ibid.*

⁶⁶⁸ *ibid.*

Current understanding and discourse, especially within ecumenical faith networks and circles, and among multicultural ministry practitioners, favour the notion that multicultural ministry is about responding to biblical imperatives and opportunities for mission with all peoples across the boundaries of various cultures.⁶⁶⁹

A significant challenge that it faces constantly is to do with the fact that it is perceived by many in the dominant culture as nothing more than political correctness, a form of affirmative action, for minority ethnic Christians and churches. The study continues to maintain that cultural diversity is an inherent characteristic of Christ's Church from its very inception. Whilst commitment to the gospel values of justice and equality has forced twenty first century Christianity and churches to be attentive to the reality of cultural difference, it ought to be clear that the multicultural ecclesial vision is not just for the sake of excluded Christian minorities. It is for the wholeness and well-being of the whole Church.

In a very real sense, multicultural ministry is a strategy for growing Christ's culturally inclusive Church. As such this chapter spotlights key areas in the life and witness of the Church to highlight multicultural ministry's function as a tool and strategy for cultural inclusion. Samples of key multicultural ministry tools and strategies from various denominations and contexts are used to illustrate how multicultural

⁶⁶⁹ Tahaafe-Williams, Uniting Church Studies 16.1 (June 2010): 51.

ministry works and what impacts it can make. Discussion of the usefulness or otherwise of such tools in the different contexts also ensue.

Multicultural Worship and Liturgy

The Lutheran World Federation *Statement on Worship and Culture* states that “worship is the heart and pulse of the Christian Church.”⁶⁷⁰

Chapter two of the study affirmed the centrality of worship and liturgy to the formation of Christ’s community of disciples to be more fully his Church, called to serve Christ’s ministry of inclusive love and reconciliation in the world. An emphasis was made on liturgy as the point at which “the connection between Christian faith life and Christian ethical commitment to the world is made explicit” and on the “Eucharist as a political action.”⁶⁷¹

We also stressed the view that the local church represents and embodies the one “universal” church.⁶⁷² And precisely because “Christian worship is always celebrated in a given local cultural setting” multicultural worship and liturgy assume even more significance here.⁶⁷³

⁶⁷⁰ Lutheran World Federation, “Nairobi Statement on Worship and Culture: Contemporary Challenges and Opportunities”, 1996, <http://www.worship.ca/docs/lwf_ns.html> (May 2012)

⁶⁷¹ W. Stringfellow, *A Keeper of the Word*, (Michigan: Eerdmans, 1994), pp.102-106.

⁶⁷² McGrath, *Christian Theology*, p. 415.

⁶⁷³ LWF <http://www.worship.ca/docs/lwf_ns.html>

A church that takes seriously the multicultural ecclesial vision ensures that its worship and liturgy has the capacity to be “transcultural” so that the “fundamental shape of ... Christian worship [is] shared across cultures: the people gather, the Word of God is proclaimed, the people intercede for the needs of the Church and the World, the eucharistic meal is shared, and the people are sent out into the world for mission.”⁶⁷⁴ Multicultural worship and liturgy is also contextually relevant using “a given culture’s values and patterns” consistent with gospel values “to express the meaning and purpose of Christian worship.”⁶⁷⁵ Certainly, multicultural worship is inherently “counter-cultural, challenging what is contrary to the Gospel in any given culture”, and finally, it is “cross-cultural, making possible sharing between different local cultures.”⁶⁷⁶ In short, multicultural Christian worship is characterized by being “transcultural, contextual, counter-cultural, and cross-cultural.”⁶⁷⁷ In basic multicultural terms, this means that:

A multicultural church is intentional in developing multicultural worship. Though aware of the challenges in developing worship that enables inclusive input and participation, it knows that unity cannot be achieved if one part of the church is overlooked or diminished. It strives to weave different experiences and rituals into its worship using images, symbols, and language that are inclusive, and which honour and respect different cultural traditions and spirituality.⁶⁷⁸

⁶⁷⁴ LWF, <http://www.worship.ca/docs/lwf_ns.html>

⁶⁷⁵ LWF, < http://www.worship.ca/docs/lwf_ns.html >

⁶⁷⁶ LWF, <http://www.worship.ca/docs/lwf_ns.html>

⁶⁷⁷ LWF, <http://www.worship.ca/docs/lwf_ns.html>

⁶⁷⁸ Tahaafe-Williams & Ackroyd, Multicultural Ministry, p.11.

Hence, the multicultural sharing of “hymns and art and other elements of worship across cultural barriers helps enrich the whole Church and strengthen the sense of the communion of the Church.”⁶⁷⁹ De Young et al stress the importance of worship reflecting aspects of the cultures the church wishes to reach and the cultures that comprise the surrounding communities.⁶⁸⁰ Otherwise, those cultures are likely to receive a message that they are not welcome at all. Gonzalez conceives of multicultural worship as Christians “rehearsing” or living into God’s multicultural future, and as “proclamation” of the final gathering of all the multitudes in front of the Lamb, both of which require the church to ensure that “here and now, as there and then” its whole life and witness reflect God’s gift of cultural diversity.⁶⁸¹

An ongoing issue that often gets in the way of multicultural worship is the perception that being inclusive of different cultures diminishes personal preferences (in music for example) and many find this rather challenging. The task of multicultural ministry in worship and liturgy includes ensuring that seminars for building capacity and competency in multicultural worship and liturgy are developed and run periodically around the church. This will not only spread awareness but also build up a pool of resource people as multicultural worship trainers. Further,

⁶⁷⁹ LWF, <http://www.worship.ca/docs/lwf_ns.html>

⁶⁸⁰ De Young et al, *United by Faith*, p.176.

⁶⁸¹ Gonzalez, *For the Healing*, p.110.

multicultural ministry should encourage church activities and programs that help people value human relationships providing opportunities for them to “practice being happy that someone sitting in the pew next to me speaks to God that way”, and it should develop user friendly multicultural worship and liturgy resources for the whole Church that fosters a church culture that is open to “letting God weave us together in love.”⁶⁸²

In addition, multicultural ministry ensures that corporate worship of the Church at its special gatherings and meetings models multicultural worship and liturgy so that all who come from different parts of the Church will experience the rich diversity of God’s gifts as well as make the connections between the liturgy and the realities of the world that they are called to love and minister to.

I refer to the appendices section of the study where I have included a sample of a multicultural worship service of induction that I planned and organized.⁶⁸³ The liturgy is adapted from *Uniting in Worship*.⁶⁸⁴ For obvious reasons the whole order cannot be included here but key elements and even some words of prayers and hymns are included to give a sense of the richness of spirituality, theology, as well as the clear connections to the realities of the world embodied in the liturgy.

⁶⁸² Tahaafe-Williams & Ackroyd, Multicultural Ministry Tool, p11.

⁶⁸³ See Appendix

⁶⁸⁴ UCA Joint Board of Christian Education, Uniting in Worship, (Melbourne: Uniting Church Press, 1988), pp. 525-540.

Note that the worship leadership is very mixed and multicultural, so is the music. The prayers, the readings, and the Creed are done in different languages. Note also the special place of indigenous culture and spirituality woven into the liturgy. The majority groups involved in this gathering are Tongan, Korean and Anglos hence the predominant use of those three languages in the liturgy. But in respect of the multicultural mix of the whole Church, there are other languages being used. English is the dominant culture's language and it is also the common language that all the different cultures can communicate in.

Elements like the sound of the conch shell used for the Call to Worship is specifically significant for Tongans, Fijians and other Pacific Island cultures for whom the conch shell is the traditional means of calling the community to gather. The gospel reading was announced in liturgical dance by a young Tongan dancer in traditional costume. The Prayers of the People uses images without words and accompanied by didgeridoo music. Of course, this sample cannot really convey the look and feel of the worship space, with the visual images and symbols used to convey the multicultural richness in spirituality and gifts. The screen that conveyed the text to the gathered also used creative imagery. While by no means the perfect multicultural worship service (of induction), this sample nevertheless gives some ideas about

multicultural worship that strives to be transcultural, contextual, counter-cultural, and cross-cultural.

Indeed, worship is “typically the nerve centre of culturally and racially diverse congregations” and that in itself is a powerful witness to the inclusive mission and ministry of Christ.⁶⁸⁵ In the very least, multicultural worship “however imperfectly ... is sometimes creating spaces of appearance and recognition for ... *Others*.”⁶⁸⁶ The kind of awareness and sensitivity required for creating such a space is what multicultural ministry should have the capacity for.

Meetings and Decision-making Processes

A key area of multicultural concern is about ensuring full participation of all the church membership in decision making. Unsurprisingly, church life involves a huge amount of meetings where significant decisions are made. In some churches “meetings play an important role ... because through talking together we try to discern God’s will and make decisions which will influence the direction of ministry and mission.”⁶⁸⁷ In a multicultural church people bring “different cultural understandings of conducting meetings” and in terms of communication, there are various assumptions and expectations

⁶⁸⁵ Charles Foster, Embracing Diversity: Leadership in Multicultural Congregations, (Bethesda, MD: Alban Institute, 1997) p.79.

⁶⁸⁶ Fulkerson, Places of Redemption, p.125.

⁶⁸⁷ M. Yang, ed., Growing Multicultural Congregations, (Sydney: NSW Board of Mission, 2003), p.67.

brought to bear on how people communicate with each other.⁶⁸⁸ However, it is often the case that members of the minority ethnic cultures shy away from participating in meetings sometimes because of language barriers, but more often due to lack of cross-cultural communication tools to help both dominant culture and minority culture understand each other at meetings.

Yang emphasizes the importance of stating the “purpose of the gathering” very clearly to avoid misunderstandings; setting “ground rules” to help facilitate and accommodate the different assumptions and expectations about communication a diverse group of people bring to a meeting; giving clear “procedural instructions” so all members know what to expect.⁶⁸⁹

Multicultural ministry can assist by developing resources and running seminars on multicultural church meeting processes and procedures which can be part of an intentional programme for developing multicultural leadership, for example. In addition, it can provide “cross-cultural training programmes for the whole Church focusing on cross-cultural communication, decision-making procedures, time management, and conflict resolution” which should help raise awareness across the church and build capacity for more effective and

⁶⁸⁸ Tahaafe-Williams & Ackroyd, Multicultural Ministry, p.21.

⁶⁸⁹ Yang, Growing Multicultural, pp.68-69.

efficient multicultural meetings and decision-making.⁶⁹⁰ These initiatives should further enable “the development of a multicultural meeting manual for the church that includes clear guidelines on cross-cultural meeting etiquette.”⁶⁹¹

Most importantly, multicultural ministry can introduce different cultural approaches to meetings that can more effectively allow the different voices to be heard in appropriate and meaningful ways. Such efforts may even change the whole culture of church meetings in radical and life-giving ways for all involved. This is the case in the United Church of Canada as part of that denomination’s effort to become an intercultural church. The Task Group on Intercultural Ministries set up in 2009 to carry out some intensive work on evaluating the Church’s intercultural commitment and ministry, decided to model in its work and tasks a different approach to meetings altogether. A model that takes seriously the multicultural vision which requires that church meetings should strive to respect and honour different cultural traditions to ensure no one culture dominates meeting procedures and decision-making. Hence the *Circle Process* included here:

As a task group the way we did the ‘circle process’ evolved during the course of our meetings together. The circle was chosen as the meeting format because it not only lends itself readily to working amid diversity, it is also a beautiful tool that enables those who participate in it to foster deeper relationships with others and self.

⁶⁹⁰ Tahaafe-Williams & Ackroyd, Multicultural Ministry, p.21.

⁶⁹¹ *ibid.*

By its nature, in the circle, all persons are equal, each has a voice (even in making the choice to pass or not be heard at a particular time gives the 'speaker' a sense of empowerment and belonging), and each is valued as an individual with a contribution to make to the whole.

As a tool, the circle creates a safe space (sacred space) where persons can share (open up) without fear of being interrupted or put down.

In such an atmosphere participants learn to respect others, respect what they have to say, (in turn) each learns what they have to say is valued thus creating a sense of trust and security.

The circle is especially good for dealing with contentious issues because it creates a very respectful atmosphere in which the likelihood of getting back and forth argument and speakers vying to make points heard is minimized – ideally not engaged in.

Visually the circle invokes a sense of communion, equality, value, and common purpose amongst those gathered.

Essential/basic elements that undergirded our work circle were:

- The 'Circle Process'
- Our covenant
- Intercultural Conflict Resolution Process

Basic format for the 'circle process' for members of the task group:

- Gathering
- Welcome/Worship
- Renewal of Covenant
- Check in
- Overview of Meeting Agenda
- Agenda items – task group work
- (from time to time we broke from the circle to work in smaller groups – which then reported back to the whole)
- Worship

The 'circle process' used by the task group saw members gather around a worship centre (prepared to celebrate the liturgical season or predominant meeting theme). The meeting was in the context of

worship, with worship at the beginning and end of each day. Following words of welcome task group members engaged in Worship – prepared by group members around the season or theme incorporating visuals, language, practices from the varying cultural backgrounds

Before the invitation to ‘check in’ (a way for members to enter into ‘circle space’ by sharing something of what they brought to the meeting with them), the covenant (our agreement of how we would work together) was renewed – sometimes by individuals reading separate pieces – sometimes in unison.

During ‘check in’ as well as during work times varying ways to speak in the circle were utilized – sometimes moving clockwise – other times counter clockwise; sometimes using the technique of mutual-invitation (a technique in which one speaker then invites another to speak technique in which one speaker then invites another to speak), at other times using a ‘pop-corn’ technique (a technique where persons speak one after another in no particular order in the circle – only when no other person is speaking).

Whichever technique was used to talk in the circle, care was taken that only one person speaks while all others listen (there was no dialogue as in ordinary conversation). Silence was respected “...leaving room for Spirit, who has a different sense of time...” (from the *Covenant* for the Task Group on Intercultural Ministries).

After all had had an opportunity to ‘check in’, the Agenda for the meeting was reviewed with adjustments made where needed. Here persons in the circle had opportunity for input using the same respectful ways of communicating as described above.

Work in the circle was carried out in like manner. If a decision was required members moved around the circle as many times as necessary for consensus.

When conflict arose in the circle, techniques of intercultural conflict resolution were invoked – a time of learning as well as a time of restoration of relationship.

As the model for meeting used by The Intercultural Task Group the circle became a place of gathering, a place of sharing joy and sorrow, a place of work, a place of healing, a place of forming deep bonds of friendship in an intercultural context.⁶⁹²

⁶⁹² Intercultural Ministries Task Group, “Living into Transformation: Vision for Becoming an Intercultural Church”, General Council Executive (March 2012) <<http://www.gc41.ca/sites/default/files/intercultural-ministries.pdf>> (September, 2012)

The Uniting Church in Australia *Manual for Meetings* states:

Church meetings that encourage community and listening to one another in a spirit of openness and humility are more likely to discern the will of God.⁶⁹³

A manual for meetings may not look like it has anything to do with multicultural ministry, but I spend a huge amount of time helping church members understand how to conduct meetings in a culturally sensitive style and this particular manual is one that I use a lot. Further, if multicultural ministry is not about enabling different people to listen to each other and to work together to discern the will of God together, then I would give up. Multicultural ministry is uniquely placed to assist the Church to conduct culturally inclusive meetings and decision-making processes, “ensuring that people listen to one another” to find solutions and “share hopes and concerns ... as they seek the will of God for the church’s mission and ministry.”⁶⁹⁴

Rites of Passage and Pastoral Ministry

An often neglected area in church life and witness is to do with diverse cultural traditions and customs pertaining to rites of passage such as birth, marriage, and death. Often the church’s ministry leadership is not at all well equipped to give appropriate pastoral care and support to a culturally diverse membership in baptisms, weddings, and

⁶⁹³ Uniting Church in Australia, “Manual for Meetings”, Constitution and Regulations, 2012 edn., (Sydney: UCA, 2012), p.6.

⁶⁹⁴ Tahaafe-Williams & Ackroyd, Multicultural Ministry, p.21.

funerals. Understanding rites of passage rituals and experiences belonging to peoples of different cultural backgrounds is crucial to the life and witness of the whole church because these are key areas in human life where great vulnerabilities and pain exist and which must be treated with sensitivity and respect. Multicultural ministry's role is again primarily educational and its efforts can be focused in ensuring that all members of the church, especially its key leadership groups including ministers, elders, and other lay leaders, understand the importance of such practices to different cultures. In addition, it can ensure that space and opportunities are provided for reflection on the implications of these rites of passage practices for the Church's theology, pastoral care, ministry and mission.⁶⁹⁵

Multicultural ministry can give a proactive response to these pastoral issues in the spirit of acceptance and understanding for "seeking to understand more about the cultures that make up our multicultural society demonstrates the intent to become actively engaged with them ... the opposite of ignoring their existence, or passively tolerating them – features which amount to indifference, or even neglect."⁶⁹⁶ This is exactly the response of the *Minority Ethnic Anglican Concerns Committee* (MEACC) in 2006 when it developed a cross-cultural

⁶⁹⁵ Tahaafe-Williams & Ackroyd, Multicultural Ministry, p. 42.

⁶⁹⁶ Minority Ethnic Anglican Concerns Committee, Baptisms Weddings and Funerals: Cross-cultural Ministry, (London: Diocese of Southwark, 2006), p.3.

ministry resource on *baptisms, weddings and funerals*. Aware of the perception that this culturally specific approach may attract, it stated:

Although their context is primarily about meeting minority ethnic needs at critical times, they have a wider significance. Baptisms, weddings and funerals are points of contact when pasturing takes place. How these events are handled can strengthen the links between the Church and community members. They can provide opportunities for mission. Many people who do not attend church regularly come to the Church in times of joy and sorrow. It is important that the clergy responds with understanding, for it is often at these times that there is an opportunity to bring new members to the Church. Many people have joined a particular church because of their experience in the way that they were ministered to at a baptism, a wedding or a funeral.⁶⁹⁷

The MEACC resource covers fourteen different cultures and one of those is included here as a sample giving a better understanding of how a particular culture (in this instance Hong Kong Chinese) understands Christian rituals and practices through their own cultural lens. It also demonstrates the very constructive and useful assistance multicultural ministry can make in equipping ministry agents and the whole church to make real the vision of a multicultural church. This sample details how Hong Kong Chinese Christians practice the three rituals:

Baptisms

There are no specific Chinese traditions associated with baptism. However, clergy assist with the selection of a Christian name for the child. Lunch follows the baptism, and officiating clergy are invited to the lunch.

Weddings

There are two parts to a wedding. The first part is the engagement. Early in the morning of the appointed day the

⁶⁹⁷ Minority Ethnic Anglican Concerns Committee, *Baptisms Weddings & Funerals*, p.3.

groom and the best man visit the bride's house. There is bargaining over the fee (lucky money) for opening the door. Sums like 888 or 999 are associated with good luck. The groom and best man are invited into the house. They kneel to give the agreed fee to the bride's parents and grandparents. This is followed by tea with them. The parents receive the cup of tea and return the lucky money to the couple wishing them good fortune. If the priest is close to the family s/he would be invited to attend.

Three days afterwards the bride, groom, best man and bridesmaids visit the groom's family when this ceremony is repeated, In recent times these two ceremonies have been taking place on the same day.

The second part is the marriage ceremony in church which takes place in the afternoon. The bride wears white. Officiating clergy wear a red stole. This makes the couple happy as red is a colour that is associated with good fortune.

The priest asks "Who permits this man to get married to this woman?" Both the bride's father and the groom's father reply "I will". It has occasionally happened that one of the respondents said he was against the marriage. This has resulted in the marriage ceremony having to be suspended in order to enable the priest to go with the couple to the vestry and check that the relevant permission had been obtained. Indeed, it is important to check that parental consent had been given before the marriage service takes place. Engagement without the parent's consent is considered disrespectful.

Prior to the exchange of rings the couple bows to the parents of the bride, then to the groom's to say "thank you".

After the service the priest invites the parents to witness the signature of the marriage certificate.

A tea reception follows in the church hall for the whole congregation. Afterwards there is a banquet for relatives and close friends to which the clergy is invited. The priest gives a blessing at the start of the banquet.

Funerals

The priest visits the bereaved family before the funeral to discuss the details of the service including what should be included in the eulogy. In Hong Kong the service would be held in the funeral home. In the UK the service is held in the funeral home. It is traditional for the family to prepare white envelopes containing a white handkerchief, two pieces of candy and two ten pence pieces. The handkerchief is a symbol for wiping away tears. The candy symbolizes comfort for people who are upset

by the death. The coins represent the wish to make mourners feel strong and to bring them good luck. These envelopes are given to all who attend the funeral.

The casket is opened in the funeral home and the priest blesses the body from the head to the feet. The funeral service follows the normal Church of England rites.

The body may be buried or cremated. In the UK most Chinese people request burial. At the graveside there is a second service following which a collection is taken. This is referred to as "lucky money" and is later given to officiating clergy in a red or white envelope. Rice mixed with corn may be scattered into the grave. This is a Buddhist tradition. Christians scatter just a pinch of rice as a mark of respect to the dead. There will also be burning of incense and paper money. As these traditions are observed clergy stand at the far end of the grave – a little distance away.

When the ceremonial has been completed the priest shakes hands with the family. The priest will be invited back to a meal with the family members. This will usually be in a restaurant. It is a time for the priest to greet the family and invite them to the church. It is also customary for the priest to write to the family afterwards.⁶⁹⁸

The value of such a resource to the life and witness of the whole Church cannot be underestimated. Every ministry agent or minister should be required to build their capacity for cross-culturally appropriate pastoral care and support in such situations outlined above. Certainly, a multicultural ministry resource that caters for such needs would add value for growing the multicultural church. Again, it cannot be emphasised enough how multicultural ministry can be vital to equipping the church in this way.

⁶⁹⁸ MEACC, p.5.

Ministry of Empowerment

The study accepts that churches that make official declarations that they are multicultural do not automatically become multicultural. It is precisely the point made in this chapter in support of multicultural ministry as an ecclesial programme to help the church achieve that goal. There needs to be recognition that the minority ethnic groups have a critical role to play in building the culturally inclusive Church of Christ. But they need to grow in confidence and strength in order to make a meaningful contribution. A key way to help these groups grow is through multicultural ministry initiated programmes of empowerment. This often involves providing spaces and opportunities for minority ethnic groups to come together to celebrate their cultural traditions, values and identities. They are opportunities to share their stories, their concerns and their struggles as minority peoples seeking to settle in an unfamiliar and sometimes inhospitable environment. They are opportunities to find empowerment and solidarity in each other and to share good practice and resources.

Significantly, they are opportunities to learn more about the Church to which they belong, their spiritual home, and thereby grow in confidence to take responsibility for enriching the life and witness of the Church, offering their diverse gifts in service for the glory of God. Further, these are spaces where they can be encouraged to reflect together on important issues of theology, mission and evangelism that

the Church might be wrestling with and seek to make their contribution to the conversations and debates.

It is also in these spaces that minority ethnic communities have a better chance of considering intentionally and proactively the needs of the younger generations and try to address them creatively with understanding and compassion, realizing the absolute significance of the younger generations to the life and future of the church. Moreover, these settings could be more conducive to developing leaders and equipping their people with needed leadership skills which can then be offered as great pools of resources for the wider church.

This is undoubtedly the task of multicultural ministry to ensure these opportunities and spaces are provided, and that the minority ethnic groups are adequately supported in these initiatives. From a multicultural ministry perspective, this is the church investing in its life and future, for as these communities grow in confidence and cohesiveness, the contribution they can make to the whole life and witness of the church is definitely worth investing in. That is quite apart from the influence they will have in transforming the church's multicultural aspiration to reality. Ultimately, it is multicultural ministry that has the responsibility in this area, but it is a testimony to effective multicultural ministry when the diverse peoples of God are themselves equipped to be agents of change.

While I was the multicultural ministry staff in the United Reformed Church, I saw the long term benefit to the whole church of such a programme, so I initiated it, providing space for URC members of the same cultural/ethnic group to gather together periodically, for an annual or biennial conference.

The viability of such a gathering depends on number and size. However, an initial step was to try to bring together those groups who are *minorities within minorities* as well as the big minority groups that are viable on their own. For this reason, four groups within the URC were identified as the Ghanaians, Koreans, Caribbean, and URC Asian Christians as groups to start with. A sample of the Guidelines for the URC Minority Ethnic Annual Conferences is included here and the Guidelines for one culturally specific conference, in this case the Ghanaian Conference, which I also drafted is included in the appendices section of the study.⁶⁹⁹

*Definition of the Conference*⁷⁰⁰

This is a URC-wide gathering of members of the same minority ethnic group within the URC (i.e. from the three nations of Wales, Scotland and England);

- This conference will be held annually, unless the particular group decides upon a different frequency;
- The conference is a URC-wide representative body on behalf of each minority ethnic group/community;
- It is a consultation body of the United Reformed Church;
- The conference will be conducted in the chosen language of the particular group/community.

⁶⁹⁹ Appendix IV

⁷⁰⁰ Adapted from the Uniting Church in Australia model

Aims

- To establish a network of congregations and individuals from the same cultural/ethnic background within the URC;
- To establish solidarity within the group/community;
- To seek mutual co-operation in solving difficult issues arising in the life of the churches and in the wider society;
- To share joys, common challenges, and prayers and to celebrate cultural traditions, spirituality and identities;
- To deepen understanding of the multicultural United Reformed Church and to be proactive in making a distinctive and needed contribution to its life and witness;
- To enable active participation in the decision-making process of the URC;
- To grow in confidence in order to live the multicultural vision with other minority ethnic groups in the URC and with the wider church.

Steering Committee

- The conference needs to elect a Chairperson, Secretary, Treasurer, and other office bearers to organise the conference and other events the conference wishes to hold;
- The Steering Committee's task is to organise the conference in consultation with the URC Secretary for Racial Justice and Multicultural Ministry;
- The Steering Committee does not speak on behalf of the Conference unless authorised by the Conference to do so.

Accountability

- The URC Committee for Racial Justice and Multicultural Ministry (RJ&MM) contributes to the financial support of the Conference;
- The Conference is accountable to the URC through the Committee for RJ&MM. Every four years the Conference is invited to submit a nomination for membership in the Committee for RJ&MM. The Assembly Nominations Committee appoints the Conference representative to the Committee for RJ&MM;
- The Secretary for RJ&MM is a member of the Conference;
- The Secretary for RJ&MM may attend the Steering Committee meetings.

Procedures for Submission of Recommendations

- Any recommendations produced by the Conference will be reported to the Committee for RJ&MM;
- The decision-making body of the Conference will consist of representatives from each synod/region, the number of representatives per synod to be decided by the confirmed and registered members of the Conference from each of the 13 synods of the United Reformed Church;
- At least a third of the representatives must be women and youth. The age of the youth representative is to be decided by the Conference. Care must be given to forming a well-balanced decision-making body for the wellbeing and benefit of the whole Conference;

- The Committee for RJ&MM will take action on behalf of or in co-operation with the Conference, depending on the nature of the recommendations. The approved recommendations will be sent to Mission Council or General Assembly.

Guests and Observers

- The Steering Committee of the Conference will decide who to be invited to the Conference. Normally, the URC Assembly Moderator, the Convener of the Committee for RJ&MM, the synod Moderators, the General Secretary and Deputy General Secretary, Multicultural Ministry staff and Racial Justice Advocates from the synods, members of the Ethnic Minority Lay and Ordained Ministers Association (EMLOMA), Assembly staff, appropriate local church leaders and person, Community and Ecumenical Partners and Associations are invited;
- If the Leaders or Office bearers of the 'Home' churches are invited, the URC Moderator will send an invitation on behalf of the Conference.
- The Conference will decide whether to invite groups, members and friends of the same minority ethnic background but who are not members of the URC. Such participants shall have the right to speak when invited to do so by the Chair (who also chairs the Steering Group) of the Conference, but not to vote subject to the Conference's discretion. (KTW, May 2006)

The inauguration of the Ghanaian Annual conference was a historical event in the life of the URC and it was an absolutely amazing gathering, celebrating in worship and fellowship the love of God for all of us with our diverse gifts. The guideline whilst specifically written for the Ghanaian community in the URC, it is easily adapted to suit whatever specific cultural context.

These empowerment programmes are valuable as platforms from which voices of minority ethnic groups can be heard. More importantly, they are the spaces from which they can make their distinct and valuable contributions to the whole life of the church and to the multicultural vision.

Property & Resource Sharing

Equal access to resources and the sharing of property is a huge multicultural concern. The issues in property sharing include tenant-landlord relationships, confusion of rights and responsibility in relation to property, lack of understanding about the missional role of property and resources, racism and ethnocentrism, time-management and usage, tension over hygiene issues, to name a few. Many situations of conflict in the church arise out of property sharing and resources. So this is definitely an area in which multicultural ministry plays a key role. Sorting out conflicts between groups involves a great deal of time and work to foster cross-cultural understanding and somehow find ways to reconcile groups and individuals, seminars on property sharing should be available and run regularly, and making sure that churches understand and have access to the church guidelines on property sharing. Much friction can be reduced when people can understand key instructions and papers involved in resolving conflict and other issues. Translation is a critical tool for multicultural ministry and in regards to property sharing, translation is becomes even more critical. I include in the appendices a sample of a property sharing guideline for a local UCA multicultural Parish of Anglos, Koreans, and

Tongans struggling with property sharing.⁷⁰¹ I had been involved in the consultation to resolve the conflict issues in this situation and had been consulted on the guideline which I have also translated into Tongan at the Presbytery's request. Every clause in the guideline speaks to a real issue of concern in relation to how groups and individuals understand or misunderstand the theology and mission behind property and resource sharing.

Multicultural Ministry has the capacity not only to enable better communication through translation and breaking down some of the language barriers, it can also develop and provide resources and training on property sharing and how to see and use property as missional resource. As mentioned earlier, a monocultural mindset can encourage selfish competitive approaches to the use of property and diminish the capacity of churches to generously share resources. Multicultural Ministry can facilitate learnings on various cultural approaches to property with a particular emphasis on rights versus responsibility in the context of property usage and sharing.

⁷⁰¹ See Appendix V

Multicultural Ministry – Final Word

As a church programme multicultural ministry must have clear structure and lines of accountability to ensure the work is done effectively and efficiently. It needs to clearly signal the understanding that it is not a “marginal ministry only for new migrants [but] it is an integral part of the life of the church enriching every aspect of it.”⁷⁰²

In my current role as multicultural consultant for the New South Wales and ACT Synod of the Uniting Church in Australia, I had the opportunity to restructure the synod multicultural ministry hence the sample below. This new structure has recently been endorsed by the relevant governing bodies:

Under Synod Bylaw 5A.9.3 Uniting Mission and Education (UME) may set up any consultative group or network it sees necessary to support its key areas of ministry. The following groups and networks constitute a new structure and strategies for Multicultural Ministry (MM) in the synod that fits in with the current UME structure and can function within its purview.

The group currently known as the Multicultural Ministry Reference Group (MMRG) was inherited by UME from the previous Synod structure (Board of Mission) and therefore carries with it certain understandings and ways of operating that may not necessarily function comfortably within the current UME structure. In addition, there are ongoing structural changes currently happening in the Synod that impact the way UME carries out its various tasks and responsibilities as it seeks to be faithful to the mission directions and priorities discerned by the people of God in this Synod.

With this in mind, the proposed MM structure and strategies below reflect a better fit within the current UME structure, and will have a better capacity for assisting UME to fulfil its ministry and mission priorities as set out by the Synod, now and in the long term.

The new multicultural ministry structure will comprise of:

⁷⁰² S. Yoo-Crowe, ed. The Vision of a Multicultural Church, (Sydney: National Assembly UCA, 1998), p.20.

Multicultural Ministry Advisory Group (MMAG)
Multicultural Lay & Ordained Leaders Association (MLOLA)
Multicultural Ministry Advocacy Network (MMAN)
2nd Gen Leaders Youth Forum

Terms of reference for each of these groups are below.

Appointments to Synod Committees and other Councils of the Church - A practice has developed across the Synod for Committees to approach the MMRG directly to provide a representative to participate. This has been interpreted to mean that the representative also has to be a member of the MMRG. This places a great strain on a few people, restricts the gifts and skills that might be available to any committee, and prevents a wider group of people from participating. The new MM structure not only affirms Synod's ongoing commitment to ensuring all committees and Councils have appropriate multicultural representation, it also gives MMAG the mandate (MMAG Remit point 2.) to assist the Synod in that process. If there is a need to seek advice on an appropriate appointment, the MMAG will provide such advice. That group can then seek to appoint people from its own membership and/or from the wider group of people from different cultures across the Synod with gifts and skills appropriate for the ministry of that particular committee.

Proposal:

Believing this new MM structure to have the capacity to support, promote and address multicultural mission and ministry needs in the NSW/ACT Synod, and mindful of the demands on UME to fulfil its many responsibilities as the Synod's primary mission and education agency as it oversees the operations of its various committees and consultative groups (UME Bylaws 5A.2.2 (d)), the UME Board resolves to:

- a) affirm the decision of the group currently known as the Multicultural Ministry Reference Group (MMRG) at its meeting on 21 August 2012 to disband and to:
 - write to the Chairperson in appreciation and to congratulate its members for their wisdom, courage and graciousness, thanking them for their service and ask that they make the transition to participate in the new MM structure in collaboration with the Synod Consultant for Multicultural Ministry;
 - instruct the Synod Consultant to organise an appropriate act of closure and appreciation for MMRG and its members
- b) endorse the new Multicultural Ministry structure effective immediately;

- c) appoint the members of the Multicultural Ministry Advisory Group (MMAG) as soon as possible;
- d) write to the General Secretary requesting that the Synod Standing Committee:
 - be advised of the new Multicultural Ministry structure
 - affirm the Synod's ongoing commitment to the Uniting Church's practice of balanced representation in all committees and councils in terms of age groups, lay/ordained, gender balance and cross-cultural representation
 - advise all Synod committees and agencies that if advice is needed on a multicultural appointment by a particular council or committee, a request be made to the Multicultural Ministry Advisory Group (MMAG)
 - amend By-Law 5A.2.2(d) to replace the words "Multicultural Ministry Group" with "Synod multicultural ministries"
 - amend By-Law 2.3.4(a)(iii) regarding membership of Synod Standing Committee to read: "one member nominated to the Synod by the Multicultural Ministry Advisory Group".

Multicultural Ministry Advisory Group (MMAG)

Remit:

The MMAG exists to work closely with the Consultant for Multicultural Ministry and the Resourcing Team to:

1. assist the Synod of NSW and ACT to respond appropriately to the multicultural nature of the church and society as integral to its mission directions and priorities, and to reflect these in its policies and practices;
2. assist the Synod to ensure appropriate and meaningful representation of multicultural voices, perspectives and concerns in the various Synod agencies, committees, and councils;
3. identify strategies to:
 - support minority ethnic and multicultural congregations as they seek to be the people of God where they are;
 - support minority ethnic leaders and encourage ministry with second and third generations in the Synod, recognising the need to develop and nurture multicultural leadership;
 - assist the Synod to celebrate the different racial, linguistic and cultural backgrounds of its membership, encouraging all to participate meaningfully at all levels of the Church's life;

4. identify strategies for combating racism and for raising awareness of multicultural issues in the Synod and in the wider community, in collaboration with other committees and councils of both the Synod and the Assembly;
5. promote an active and mutually supportive relationship with the NSW/ACT Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC).

Membership:

- (i) MMAG will have a balanced representation in terms of gender, generation, and physical ability
- (ii) Members will be appointed by the UME Board including:
 - six members representing the different regions around the world that are in this Synod:

African: Ghanaian, Sudanese
 Arabic/Middle East: Armenian-Lebanese, Iranian, Palestinian, Syrian
 Asian: Far East – Cambodian, Chinese, Filipino, Indonesian, [Korean], Vietnamese
 South East – Indian, Tamil
 European/Mediterranean: Hungarian, Spanish, Portuguese, Anglo-Celtic
 Pacific/Oceania: Cook Is, Fijian (plus Hindi Speaking), Niuean, Rotuman, Samoan, Tokelauan, [Tongan]

 - One Korean⁷⁰³
 - One Tongan⁷⁰⁴
 - An Indigenous representative
- (iii) A convener will be elected from the MMAG membership every eighteen months
- (iv) The MMAG will report to the UME Board through the Multicultural Consultant in the normal reporting processes of the UME Resourcing Team
- (v) The MMAG will meet at least three times per annum
- (vi) The Consultant will be responsible for MMAG record-keeping

Multicultural Lay & Ordained Leaders Association (MLOLA)

Remit:

The MLOLA is a gathering of all lay and ordained leaders in the Synod who are actively involved in multicultural ministry in the local churches and in the Presbyteries.

It gathers to:

⁷⁰³ The Koreans and Tongans are the two biggest minority ethnic groups in the Synod and it makes good sense to have one from each community in the Advisory Group

⁷⁰⁴ Since the current Consultant is Tongan there is no need for another Tongan in MMAG unless a new consultant is appointed and such person is not Tongan

- share stories, struggles, experiences, good practice ideas, and offer pastoral support to each other
- to discuss and seek to respond to current multicultural issues in the church and society, through theological and spiritual reflection and worship, in ways that would sharpen, deepen, enhance and enrich the work of MMAG and UME
- to consider together how best to use their ministry gifts, energy and time to enrich the Synod's life and witness in a diverse and multicultural society and world
- to celebrate and affirm the rich diversity that exists in the Synod as blessings and gifts from God
- collaborate together on opportunities for building capacity in various areas of mission and ministry that would enhance their work as ministry agents
- to seek creative fund raising strategies for its long term events and activities

Administration

MLOLA shall normally meet twice a year, one of which could be residential.

Administrative assistance and support will be provided by UME through the consultant in the first year. Thereafter MLOLA may be partly subsidised by UME as it sees fit as MLOLA develops into a more self-sufficient body.

The consultant will be responsible for record keeping of all the MLOLA gatherings to inform the ongoing work of MMAG, UME and the wider Synod.

Multicultural Ministry Advocacy Network (MMAN)

Remit:

The MMAN is formed to advocate for and raise awareness about multicultural ministry and racial justice issues around the Synod and are recruited from the Presbyteries. The Advocacy Network meets twice a year with the Synod Consultant – a one-day meeting and a weekend residential – to continue developing and updating the advocates' knowledge base, capacity, and competency as multicultural ministry trainers and practitioners and to find mutual support and pastoral encouragement.

Advocate Job Description:

An advocate for multicultural ministry will:

- be a committed and recognised member of the Synod Multicultural Ministry Advocacy Network (MMAN), regularly attending the Synod gatherings of the Advocacy Network
- be committed to a programme of personal training in multicultural ministry and racism awareness in order to become competent multicultural trainers themselves

- be committed to encouraging and participating in multicultural ministry and racial awareness activities in his/her Presbytery, local churches and communities
- be willing to promote multicultural ministry events and programs and to distributing information and resource materials to Presbytery and local churches highlighting such events
- be proactive about advocating for multicultural ministry and meeting with other advocates in his/her Presbytery to fellowship together, explore issues, share information, plan activities, support and follow up multicultural initiatives from the Synod Consultant and MMAG, promote and support the Synod-wide advocacy gatherings
- be able to make links with other UCA, ecumenical and community groups with interest in multicultural and racial justice issues, including inter faith groups and networks working with refugee and asylum seekers
- be willing to support and promote Synod resolutions on multicultural ministry and other social justice matters

Multicultural Youth Forum (MYF)

Remit:

The Multicultural Youth Forum is a gathering of young leaders around the Synod working in and with multicultural and minority ethnic congregations and groups in the Presbyteries of NSW/ACT. It gathers to:

- share stories, struggles, experiences, good practice ideas in youth ministry, and offer pastoral support to each other
- to explore and discuss current multicultural topics in the church and society, particularly issues of age and intergenerational relations, gender, class, race and ethnicity, in ways that would deepen their knowledge and sharpen their leadership skills
- to continue developing and updating their knowledge base, capacity, and competency as youth leaders, and to find mutual support and pastoral encouragement through theological and spiritual reflection and worship
- to consider together how best to use their gifts, energy and time to enrich the Synod's life and witness in a diverse and multicultural society and world
- to affirm the rich diversity that exists in the Synod and to celebrate who they are as blessings and gifts from God

- collaborate together on opportunities for building capacity in various areas of mission and ministry that would enhance their gifts and skills as leaders of the Church now and into the future

Administration:

The 2nd Gen Leaders' Group shall normally meet twice a year, one of which could be residential. Administrative assistance and support will be provided by UME through the Multicultural and Next Generations Consultants.

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For multicultural ministry to operate effectively as a programmatic tool, and to utilize its capacity to make changes, it must have a clear structure that the umbrella organization/church can comprehend and embrace. It must have clear lines of communication and accountability also that encourage team work, collaboration, and strategic approaches to achieving the multicultural goal.

Closing Remarks

The areas of ministry highlighted above are only used as examples to illustrate the specific impact multicultural ministry can have in growing culturally inclusive churches. The impact multicultural ministry makes in several other areas of ministry, specifically in examining ecclesial policies, processes, and procedures for possible blockages to the full participation of minority ethnic people in the whole life of the church was dealt with in chapter three. Also the minority ethnic skills audit to ensure equal opportunity policies for balanced representation in committees and councils was also looked at in that chapter.

The issue of theological education and ministerial formation are also very significant and there are many ways that multicultural ministry can make a multicultural impact in that area. We've touched on some of those issues briefly in chapter three and in chapter four. In fact, there is really no ministry in the life of the church that multicultural ministry cannot touch or influence for the sake of the multicultural vision. For now though the areas above can give a good insight into the sphere and scope of influence multicultural ministry can have.

There is no doubt in my mind that multicultural ministry can be an effective tool for growing a multicultural church; can effectively address racial injustices and disparities in the church; and that its scope of influence is really only limited by imagination and willingness, for it ranges from shaping policy to grassroots mobilization and coordination. Even with the presence of overt and subliminal obstacles, this ministry can still make an impact. This is especially so in a twenty first century world in which the reality of multicultural diversity is undeniably one of the most, if not the most, crucial global issue that impacts all aspects of life.

The issue is not whether multicultural ministry can make an impact. The issue is more about the length of time it takes to bring about a truly culturally inclusive church. The changes it has made, given the

evidence in the three denominations looked at in this study, have been rather slow and incremental. I suspect that as long as there is a dominant culture with monocultural tendencies running and controlling the church then the impact multicultural ministry can make will continue to be slow and incremental. According to Eric Law, it is the very human fear of “losing control ... fear of losing identity ... of unmanageable conflict” to name a few, that is holding back multicultural ministry’s effort to fully transform the multicultural vision into reality.⁷⁰⁵ He writes:

What are your fears? This is the question that must be asked if we are to enable a church community to explore doing ministry in the multicultural reality that we now live in. Naming these fears is the first step. Addressing these fears with the appropriate tools, skills, processes, pastoral care, and theological reflections, is the key to a successful movement towards becoming a multicultural and inclusive community.⁷⁰⁶

I may not get to see and experience this most elusive inclusive community in my life time; but I still have energy now and passion to shape and equip a younger generation of multicultural ministry practitioners with the appropriate tools and skills to conquer fears!

⁷⁰⁵ E. Law, “Fear: Stumbling Blocks for Ministry in Multicultural Settings”, in Richmond & Yang (eds.), Crossing Borders, p. 24.

⁷⁰⁶ Law, Crossing Borders, p. 24.

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