

Ethnic and Diaspora churches in the UK

A response to Paul Davies' paper
By Abraham Nam Jung

'He determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek him and perhaps reach out for him and find him' (Acts 17:26-27).

As the Bible clearly declares God oversees human history. The unprecedented acceleration of migration of peoples from around the world, often from 'the 10/40 Window' nations to the UK in recent years should be seen as a part of God's divine purpose.

1. Importance of Ethnic and Diaspora churches

According to <Pulling out of nose dive> by Peter Brierley, Christian Research - findings and analysis of the 2005 English Church Census:

Rates of decline (p.18)

1979 – 1989 -1.4% per year
1989 – 1998 -2.7% per year
1998 – 2005 -2.3% per year

The current rate of church decline is not as great as it was in the 1990s, but is still considerably more than it was in the 1980s. 'We are coming out of the nosedive, but no U-turn is yet in sight – we are still dropping.'

Brierley emphasizes that 'the growing ethnic and independent churches are critical for the wellbeing of the future church life in England, and hold the balance between a reducing rate of decline and an increasing rate of decline.'

The book went on to say that 'a number of ministers who have come to England either as a foreign "reverse missionary" worker or as an immigrant, showing that the sheer quantity of such people is becoming important, and concludes that "increasingly the nature of faith in this country may be defined by immigrants.'¹

Ethnicity analysis (Chapter 5)

• **Higher church attendance**

Church attendance by ethnicity, 1998 and 2005 (p.91)

Category ²	1998	change	2005	Percentage of total		National percentage		
				1998	2005	1998	2001	2005E
White	3,274,600	-19%	2,640,600	88.1%	83.4%	93.8%	91.4%	88.3%
Black	268,600	+23%	331,400	7.2%	10.4%	1.9%	2.6%	3.8%
Indian	54,300	+9%	59,400	1.5%	1.9%	3.0%	4.1%	6.0%
Chinese	54,700	+3%	56,400	1.5%	1.8%	0.3%	0.4%	0.8%
Other Asian	36,300	+24%	45,000	1.0%	1.4%	0.4%	0.7%	1.3%
Other Non-White	26,200	+27%	33,400	0.7%	1.1%	0.6%	0.8%	1.0%
Total	3,714,700	-15%	3,166,200	100%	100%	47m	49m	50m
Total Non-White	440,100	+19%	525,600	11.9%	16.6%	6.2%	8.6%	11.7%

¹ Brierley 2006:93

² **White:** including Non-British with European origin such as North America, Australia or New Zealand / **Black:** Black Caribbean, African, and Black other / **Chinese:** Chinese, Korean and Japanese / **Indian:** Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi / **Other Asian:** Filipinos, Malaysians, Singaporeans, Thai and Vietnamese / **Other Non-White:** South American

In 2005, one in six people (17%) going to church was non-white. Only five-sixths (83%) of churchgoers in England were white.³ The proportion of non-white attenders in English churches has increased from 12% in 1998 to 17% in 2005 and it is likely to rise even further.

Over three-fifths (63%) of the non-white attendance is the black churchgoers. Black people now account for 10% of English congregations and other ethnic minorities, 7%. All the non-white ethnic groups have grown across Greater London while the white attenders in both Inner and Outer London have declined. There are now more black people going to church in Inner London than white. Black churchgoers form almost half, 44%, of all Inner London church attendance and white churchgoers make up 42%.

- **Younger age groups**

Age of churchgoers by ethnicity, 2005 (p.101)

Black churches have a higher percentage of children, Asian churches a higher percentage of those ages 20 to 44, and white churches a higher percentage of those 45 and over.

Black young people in church have been one of the strengths of the black churches. Their numbers are helped by the higher fertility rate. However, the fact that the percentage of black teenagers in church is little different from that of other ethnic groups, suggest that black youth may be beginning to fall away similarly to their white counterparts.

2. Lessons for the British churches

The native churches have not been very effective in reaching the ethnic populations in the UK.

- **Native Christians' exodus from ethnic neighbourhood**

Mowle found that the more concentrated the deprivation of an area, the fewer Christians will live there and prosperous, middle-class areas, on the other hand, house disproportionately high number of resident Christians.⁴

Brierley also shows that the percentage of churchgoers in Suburban/Urban fringe (36%) is significantly higher than that of City Centre (5%) or Inner City (12%).⁵

In a similar context in America, Greenway says that the pattern of churches running away from new ethnics has, unfortunately, a long and painful history in America.⁶ He points out that insofar as suburbia arose as a reaction to the city and its people, suburbia is an attitude, a mind-set, as much as it is a geographical entity.⁷

- **Ambivalent attitude toward immigrants**

In Britain, legislation and policy on immigration and asylum have frequently been a reaction to social attitudes about race relations. Despite being a hybrid nation, too many people in Britain have a tendency towards xenophobia.⁸ Nearly half the people in the UK think that immigration has led to a decline in their quality of life.

Over the last forty years, two trends could be observed within legislation in these areas. On the one hand, immigration and asylum policy seems to have reflected a negative attitude to minority

³ This is double the percentage of non-white population in 2001, half as much as the estimated population in 2005. Non-white church attendance has increased by a fifth (+19%) in the period 1998 to 2005, while the white attendance has dropped by a fifth (-19%).

⁴ Mowle 2004:3

⁵ Brierley 2006:70

⁶ Greenway and Monsma 2000:94

⁷ Greenway and Monsma 2000:96

⁸ Stott 2006:280

ethnic groups, while on the other hand, race relations policy seems to have attempted to promote a multi-ethnic society. This should not surprise us, since both positive and negative attitudes are present together throughout British society.⁹

Greenway also echoes that people often see immigrants 'as unfair economic competition and a threat to their own social welfare'. So hostility and even violence between the established residents and the immigrants are not uncommon. The problem is that many Christians also share the same kind of ambivalence.¹⁰

- **Lack of understanding of the new paradigm**

High mobility / cultural hybridity / mixed identity / divided loyalty

The phenomenon of diaspora accelerates the process of mixing resulted in the necessity of a new paradigm of ambiguous ethnic identity or cultural 'hybridity', as an alternative to traditional concept of 'homogeneity'.¹¹

Even though migrants invest socially, economically, and politically in their new society, they may continue to participate in the daily life of the society from which they emigrated but which they did not abandon. They are often bilingual, can lead dual lives, move easily between cultures, frequently maintain homes in two countries, and are incorporated as social actors in both societies.¹²

- **Inadequate theological and missiological training**

One of the reasons why many ethnic communities in Britain are completely unreached is due to lack of information (as a result of lack of research) to mobilize a ministry to reach them.¹³ Adequate theological and missiological training is a key to prepare leaders to minister beyond the traditional white middle-class and to be adaptable to the needs of ethnic and diaspora peoples.

'Until there are enough people who have prepared themselves for urban mission by gaining a firm hold on an adequate theology for the city and a biblical understanding of ethnicity, evangelistic efforts among urban ethnic will continue to be weak and faltering'.¹⁴

3. Multi-ethnic vision

We need to catch the biblical vision of a multi-ethnic church and society.

- **Mixed congregations**

Over half, 54%, of congregations in England are all-white (down from 59% in 1998); 3% of congregations, in 2005 and in 1998 are 100% non-white; and the remaining 43% of congregations are mixed.

In other words, over 20,000 churches have only white people attending the services and many such churches are in rural areas. There are nearly 1000 congregations which are entirely African, Caribbean, Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Tamil, Thai, or other nationalities. Some 16,500 congregations have members from different ethnic backgrounds.

However, the proportion of people of different ethnicities is most likely to form up to 10% of the congregation. There are relatively few churches where the mix is higher than that (between 11 and 99%). Even where they are, it doesn't necessarily mean a genuine multi-ethnic congregation.

⁹ Stott 2006:282

¹⁰ Greenway and Monsma 2000:93

¹¹ Wan 2004:109

¹² Wan 2004:109

¹³ Johnstone and Mandryk 2005:653

¹⁴ Greenway and Monsma 2000:98-99

Almost half (44%) have just a small number of people (1 to 5%) of different ethnic background, equivalent to 2 or 3 people (perhaps one family) in an average congregation of 84 people.

Congregations which are mixed tend to be smaller than average, 54 people against the overall average of 84. All white congregation average is 106 people, and all ethnic average is 128. The fact that mixed congregations are the smallest may suggest a problem here.

- **Biblical foundations**

What was Paul's reaction to the multi-ethnic, multicultural and multireligious Athens (Acts ch.17)?

Stott offers four answers. Firstly, because God is the God of creation, we affirm the unity of the human race. From one man God made every nation. Secondly, because God is the God of history, we affirm the importance of ethnic and cultural diversity. Not only God made every nation from one man that they should inhabit the earth, but he also 'determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live' (Acts 17:26). Thirdly, because God is the God of revelation, we affirm the finality of Jesus Christ. Paul refused to acquiesce in the religious pluralism of Athens. An acceptance of the diversity of cultures does not mean an equal acceptance of the diversity of religions. And fourthly, because God is the God of redemption, we affirm the glory of the Christian church. Jesus died and rose to create a new and reconciled community, his church. The New Testament is the story of the divine ingathering of nations into a single international society.¹⁵

Because of the unity of humankind, we demand equal rights and equal respect for ethnic minorities. Because of the diversity of ethnic groups, we renounce cultural imperialism and seek to preserve all those riches of cultures which are compatible with Christ's lordship. Because of the finality of Christ, we affirm that religious freedom includes the right to propagate the gospel. Because of the glory of the church, we must seek to rid ourselves of any lingering racism and strive to make it a model of harmony, in which the multi-ethnic dream comes true.¹⁶

- **Tension between 'Christian unity' and 'cultural identity'**

It is biblically right for each of us to be conscious of our nationality and grateful for it. But since God has also brought us into this new society, he is thereby calling us into a new internationalism. Every Christian knows this tension.

Christian 'internationalism' does not mean that our membership of Christ and his church obliterates our nationality, any more than it does our masculinity or femininity. It means rather that, while our ethnic, national, social and sexual distinctions remain, they no longer divide us. They have been transcended in the unity of the family of God. The church must, therefore, exhibit its multi-ethnic, multinational and multicultural nature.

"Culture is the complement of nature. What is 'natural' is God-given and inherited; what is 'cultural' is man-made and learned."¹⁷

- **Homogeneous Unit Principle**

There has been considerable debate in recent years whether a local church could or should ever be culturally homogeneous.

A consultation concluded that 'in many situations a homogeneous unit church can be a legitimate and authentic church. Yet we are also agreed that it can never complete in itself. Indeed, if it remains in isolation, it cannot reflect the universality and diversity of the Body of Christ.

¹⁵ Stott 2006:291

¹⁶ Stott 2006:291

¹⁷ Stott 2006:288

Therefore every homogeneous unity church must take active steps to broaden its fellowship in order to demonstrate visibly the unity and the variety of Christ's Church.¹⁸

4. Unity around mission

In terms of the mission of migrant churches, Wan writes three dimensions of mission.

1) *Internal Mission* (Mission in non-western circles): the non-western Christian migrants are part of their own ethnic, national, and linguistic communities. 2) *Reverse Mission*: many non-western migrants do not confine their witness to their own circles. They are convinced of their call to preach the gospel to secular Europeans as well. And 3) *Common Mission*: mission can also be done by members of established congregations and churches in cooperation with members of migrant congregations.¹⁹

Further more, Lausanne's occasional paper on diaspora, <The new people next door>, suggests five possible ideas regarding partnership in church planting.²⁰

- *Homogeneous church* planting: those of the same cultural background and language are often in the best position to reach out to their own people.
- *Intra-ethnic group church* planting: established diaspora churches may work together by sharing resources for planting new churches for the new immigrants.
- *Inter-ethnic group church* planting: churches of the same denomination but different ethnic background may pool resources together to plant a new church for a different diaspora group.
- *International church* planting: churches made up of members from multiple nations.
- *Multi-ethnic church* planting: churches with different congregation offering services in a variety of languages.

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¹⁸ Stott 2006:290

¹⁹ Wan 2004:111-112

²⁰ Lausanne 2005:43-44