

The Biblical view of race

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[0 : 00] Now one spin-off of the unity and yet great diversity of the human race is a plethora of ethnic jokes.

And it wasn't so long ago that I remember reading in the newspaper that someone had done a PhD in this subject. And that now in a certain university on the other side of the Atlantic, a course of study is offered to students who want to avail themselves of this particular speciality.

Now there are a mass of these stories but there are two that have come to me in recent days and just to get them off my chest I thought I'd share them with you.

The first one is a Jewish story and it is said that a Jewish family were visiting a large art gallery and taking in the sights.

And eventually they came to a scene of the nativity. There was the crib and Mary and Joseph and the ox and the ass looking on. And the Jewish father looked at it with a fair degree of admiration and turned to his family and he said, just like the Jews he said, haven't got a room for the night and yet still managed to get the family portrait painted by Rubens.

[1 : 17] And the other one is an Irish story. The story of an unemployed paddy seeking employment on a London building site.

And after a quick tour of the operations, the foreman said to the Irishman that he could have the job provided he could answer a simple question. And the question was this, what's the difference between a Gerda and a Joist?

Ah, said the Irishman, that's easy. He said, Gerda, he wrote Faust. Joist, he wrote Ulysses. But I come back more seriously to our subject.

The biblical doctrine of race. I want to divide my material into two main categories and then add a postscript. First of all to look at the unity and solidarity of mankind.

And secondly the diversity and complexity. And then by way of a postscript to say a little about the uniqueness of the individual. Who of course is the most important for our consideration in this subject.

[2 : 24] By way of introduction then. From the biological, physical or genetical point of view. Race is a biological concept relating to the classification unit that scientists adopt immediately below the species.

The species in our purposes this evening being mankind. Is considered or has been considered down through the ages as capable of subdivision into a number of identifiable races or subspecies.

Now it is widely accepted that the various classification systems are all less than satisfactory. And that by virtue of the complexity of the subject matter. The various races of mankind just do not drop neatly into any classification.

A standard contemporary attempt at classification can be found on page 107 of the World Christian Encyclopedia. The five races that are listed there are said to be Australoid, Capoid, that's the pygmies and bushmen.

Caucasoid, Mongoloid and Negroid. Now the criteria that has been applied by anthropologists to determine race includes such things as relative length of different parts of the body.

[3 : 38] Size and shape of the head. Amount of body hair. Hair colour and texture. Blood types. Facial characteristics. And of course skin colour. But increasingly modern anthropologists are rejecting it seems as outdated the concept of different races.

And for such reasons as the continual population movements across the world. The resultant interbreeding which has taken place. Populations have so graded into each other. That it is arguable that no pure races exist.

If they ever existed. As Eugene Nider, the American Bible Society missionary anthropologist has pointed out. And quoting from him he says, Actually he said it is impossible to draw a line at any point and neatly separate people into their proper racial groups.

That's the end of the quote. Nider also states that such an approach to the problem of race, though valid as a biological concept, is not a valid socio-cultural concept. It is even less satisfactory, I suggest, when we try to relate such an approach to the biblical and theological concerns before us this evening.

Nor does the biblical data sit well with distinctions such as those that we find within the scriptures. Such as people and nation, for example. Although the terms tribes, tongues, peoples, nations, kingdoms and multitudes occur in seven refrains in the book of Revelation.

[5 : 03] And thus reflect the Bible's familiarity with the ethno-linguistic complexity of the world. It does not do so with a regimented precision required by the scientific anthropologist or biologist.

And though a study of each of these New Testament Greek terms and their corresponding and supplementary Hebrew terms would prove both profitable and interesting. It would not lead us very much closer to an understanding of the main emphases of the biblical doctrine of race.

The first thing then to consider is that the Bible teaches the unity and solidarity of mankind. The Bible views the human situation fundamentally as one.

It is precisely because all men are basically similar that God can and does address himself through the single medium of scripture to all the people of the earth. Though taking cognizance of a certain diversity evident in mankind, the Bible fundamentally concerns itself with only one race.

The human race. And this is traditional of course in Reformed theology. To refer to the race. And see that as the entirety of mankind.

[6 : 14] The most basic biblical teaching is that all mankind is descended from a single pair of ancestors. Namely of course Adam and Eve. And this truth is arrived at both by explicit reference and inference.

The scriptural record of the creation of the first humans. And a special and memorable act of creation by which they were invested with the divine image. And mandated to be fruitful and multiply requires we look nowhere else to seek the founders of the human race.

And we find also in such passages as the Genesis genealogies. And the statements of Genesis 3.20. 7.23. 9.1. 9.19.

10.32. 10.32. We have clear reference to the descent of all mankind from Adam and Eve. And eventually after the flood through Noah. The fact of the organic, genetical and genealogical unity of the race is quite clear from the early scripture record.

The genealogical tables of peoples that we find in Genesis 10. Also uniquely emphasizes the unity of mankind. This table does not set out to trace the origin of a single nation.

[7 : 27] But to present the fact that all the nations are descended from Noah. The South African writer Hugo de Plessis states. And I'm quoting here. What is given here is the genealogy of the human race.

In spite of God will diversity. And there is not only the unity of common descent from Noah. But here we also find at least in principle. Complete equality of the generations.

All the peoples bear the same relationship to God. And are answerable to God in the same way. Here all ethnocentrism is transcended.

And de Plessis goes on to say. This majestic vision of the primordial relatedness of all peoples. And the fundamental equality. Is only found in the scriptures.

We find that in the Old Testament. And then likewise in the New Testament. We see also eloquent testimony to the common ancestry and organic unity of mankind. And I refer particularly to Paul's Areopagus address in Acts chapter 17.

[8 : 30] Where in verse 26. He speaks of the creation of man from one. The AV provides the word blood. The NIV provides the word man. But the thought is quite clear.

And requires perhaps no addition. To express the truth of the unity of the race. All mankind is descended from one. F.F. Bruce in his commentary on Acts. Says this.

The creator in all things in general. Is the creator of mankind in particular. The Athenians might pride themselves on being autochthonous. That is sprung from the soil of their native Attica.

But this pride was ill founded. All mankind was one in origin. All created by God. And all descended from one common ancestor. This removed the imagined justification.

That Greeks were innately superior to barbarians. As it removes all imagined justification. For parallel beliefs today. Neither in nature.

[9 : 26] Or in grace. Neither in the old creation. Nor in the new. Is there any room for ideas. Of racial superiority. As John Stott has pointed out.

The apostle in fact used this argument. As part of his expose. Of the sin and folly of idolatry. But he could equally well. Have used it. To expose the folly and evil. Of racism.

The portrayal of God given in these verses. Is of one who is creator. Sustainer. And father of all mankind. Says Stott. If he is the God of all human beings.

This will affect our attitudes to them. As well. As to him. You will find that in John Stott's book. Issues faced by Christians today. Page 205. Despite the pressures of certain pseudo-scientific trends.

In the southern states of pre-civil war America. To attempt to justify slavery. By attempting to assign to the negro. Some different racial origin. Neither Dabney nor Thornwell.

[10 : 28] Though both perhaps what would be called. Racist today. Deviated from the accepted belief. In the unity of the race. Dabney points out the theological importance.

Of this fact. And in a quotation from his lectures. In systematic theology. He says. If there are men on earth. Not descended from Adam's race. Then their federal connection. With them is broken.

But more. Their inheritance. In the Prat Evangelium. Is also interrupted. The warrant of the church. To carry the gospel to that people.

Is lacking. And with equal insistence. But greater passion. Thornwell urges. I quote again. Science. Falsely so called. May attempt to exclude him.

That is the negro. From the brotherhood of humanity. Men may be seeking eminence. And distinction. By arguments. Which link him with the brute. But the instinctive impulses.

- [11 : 23] Of our nature. Combined with the plainest declarations. Of the word of God. Lead us to recognise. In his form and lineaments. In his moral. Religious. And intellectual nature.
- The same humanity. In which we glory. As the image of God. We are not ashamed. To call him brother. You find that in. Thornwell's collected writings. Volume 4.
- Page 402. And it is of course. As I see it. A historical tragedy. That neither theologian. Seemed constitutionally able. To draw the necessary. Conclusions. And allow biblical principles.
- To triumph. Over vested interest. We cannot fail then. To notice. The clear implication. And application. Of this truth.
- Of the creation. Of the race as one. God is. By virtue of this creation. The father of all men. Who are our brothers. It is no sentimental. Or romantic doctrine.
- [12 : 17] Of liberalism. To subscribe to the brotherhood. Of all mankind. As a biblical concept. The familiar words. Of John Dunn. Are founded upon. Scriptural truths.
- The implications. Of which. Must shock us out. Of any insularity. And pride of race. You remember. His words. Any man's death. Diminishes me. Because I am involved.
- In mankind. And therefore. Never send to know. For whom the bell tolls. It tolls for thee. Not only. Do we have brotherhood. With all men. We are also.
- Our brother's keeper. We are obliged. By Christ. To love our neighbor. And we are duty bound. To do good. Unto all men. We cannot. For we must account.
- For such things. That a judgment throne. Give countenance. To any racial prejudice. But rather humble ourselves. And like our savior. Be servants of all. Of course.
- [13 : 11] Mankind. Has been characterized. On many occasions. By the sin. Of racism. And I want to look at. Two particular manifestations. Of that sinful tendency.
- There are many. That we could look at. But I want to look at. Nazi anti-semitism. And South African apartheid. Perhaps. These are the two.
- Most heinous forms. Of racism. That have come to expression. In our own century. And which cry to heaven. For the prophetic denunciation. Of biblical teaching. To be sure.
- There have been. Many other attempts. To deny the unity. Of mankind. In the subjugation. And even destruction. Of races. We cannot forget. For example. The genocide. In Cambodia.
- Or Stalin's. Ruthless. Destruction. Of racial minorities. Or the legacy. For example. Of slavery. In the USA. And the racial problems. That engulfed. That nation.
- [14 : 06] For an extensive period. And of course. The present suppression. Of Jews. In the Soviet Union. And yet. Both Nazism. And apartheid.
- Hold special claim. I believe. To our attention. For they both. Came to expression. In so-called. Christian countries. And enjoyed. The endorsement. Of large sections. Of the church.
- In those countries. At first sight. They may seem. To be very different. But despite. Gross injustice. There is certainly. No attempt. To exterminate.
- The black population. Of South Africa. However. The basic. Philosophies. Of race. Undergirding. These two systems. Are more or less. Identical.
- Both. Are preoccupied. With the idea. Of a race. Which is destined. To rule. And both. Are pathologically. Concerned. To preserve. The purity. Of the race. Even to the extent.
- [15 : 00] Of passing. And upholding laws. Designed. To prohibit. Intermarriage. Fearing. That intermarriage. Would somehow. Create a degeneration. Of the race. The notorious.

South African. Prohibition. Of mixed marriages. Act. Has now been abandoned. Is probably. Largely due. To what has been called. The steady dripping. Of moral criticism. Over a period. Of 40 years.

Rather than. A real change of heart. In the heartlands. Of Africanism. And both. Of course. Of these systems. Have segregated society. The Nazis.

By herding the Jews. Into ghettos. And the Afrikaner. Nationalists. By their group. Areas act. The family destroying. Migrant labor. And influx. Control laws. And the creation.

Of pseudo autonomous. Bantu stands. And homelands. Such as the trans sky. And cis sky. We're familiar. With the fact. That Hitler. Used a totally.

[15 : 55] Untenable. Scientific theory. Of race. To justify. His elevation. Of the Aryan idea. And the destruction. Of the Jews. Some theologians. Such as Paul Althus.

Championed. Championed. The cause. Of the preservation. As he put it. Preservation. Of the purity. Of the folk. And of our race. And few contradicted. That point of view.

In Germany. In those days. One of the very few. Is Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Edwin Robinson. In his recent biography. Of Bonhoeffer. The shame. And the sacrifice. Tells us. That on the notorious.

Crystal night. That was the night. When the. The Nazis. Went through the land. And smashed up the synagogues. And Jewish homes. Bonhoeffer wrote in his bible. Against the date. The 9th and the 11th.

Of 38. He wrote. The date that is. Sorry. He wrote the date. Beside the verse. In Psalm 74. That tells us. That they burned. All the meeting places.

[16 : 48] Of God. In the land. That night of terror. Should have raised. A clamor for justice. From the throats. Of Christians. Throughout Germany. But it did not. Karl Barth.

On reading. Eberhard Bethke's. Biography of Bonhoeffer. In 1967. Recalled with shame. That Bonhoeffer. Had spoken out. More forcibly. And clearly. Than many others. Of the persecution.

Of the Jews. As fellow human beings. The situation. Was such. Felt Bonhoeffer. Lightening affairs. In the state. To the antics. Of a mad driver. That it was not enough.

To bind up the wounds. Of the victim. But to do something. To put a spoke. In the wheel. He sought to have a statement. On the Jewish question. Incorporated in the Bethel confession. Which in turn.

Could in turn. Could well. Have been included. In the Barman declaration. And that was the expression. Of course. Of the resistance. Of the confessing church. In Germany. To Hitler's policies. But it was not incorporated.

[17 : 44] And the result has been. That Jewish writers. And thinkers. Of today. Have forced. German evangelicals. To listen. To legitimate criticism. That they were silent.

In the face. Of Hitler's holocaust. And this has created. An additional barrier. To gospel witness. To Jewish people elsewhere. As Jewish Christian. Jacob Joch.

Points out. Faith in the God of Israel. In the God of the covenant. In the God of history. Is always a test. And a challenge. But after Auschwitz. It is an agonizing venture.

For every thinking Jew. How much harder. I suggest to you. It is for Jews. To heed the church's message. When the church. That now attempts. To evangelize.

Was considered. By the Jewish people. To have been silent. During the holocaust. Few nations. In Europe. Have the record. Of Holland. Denmark. And Finland.

[18 : 39] Where Christian activity. On behalf of the Jews. Was both courageous. And sacrificial. It's an epic story. Well worth reading. Of the attempts. That were made. To preserve. Of the Jewish people.

Of those lands. Under the leadership. Of their Christian king. The people of Denmark. Shipped out the whole. Of the Jewish community. Except 52. Who had been. Taken into custody.

By the Nazis. Prior to the rescue operation. They put them. In a little armada. Of boats. And they shipped them. To neutral Sweden. The Finnish foreign minister. Declared to the Nazi authorities.

Finland is a decent nation. We would rather. Perish together. With the Jews. We will not surrender. The Jews. And of Finland's. 2000 Jews. Only four. Were deported.

The record of Christian families. In Holland. Such as the Ten Booms. Also demonstrate. The concern of Christians. To speak and act. On behalf of the victims. Of racism. And prejudice.

[19 : 35] The descendants. Of such people today. Have greater credibility. When they seek to witness. To Jewish people. Their daring deeds. Of love and kindness. Are not forgotten.

And they stand to authenticate. The gospel message. If in the trauma. Of South Africa today. White Christians. Don't learn the lessons.

Of history. Learn the lessons. Of the Nazi period. The Holocaust period. For example. And fail to speak out for. And identify. With the just grievances. Of the black majority.

I'm sure the day. Will undoubtedly dawn. When such a barrier. Of prejudice. Will have been erected. And that gospel. Witnessed by whites. To blacks. In that land. Will be virtually pointless. And will fall on deaf ears.

Seems to me. That the battle. Must be fought on two fronts. It must be shown. That the racial myths. Undergirding apartheid. Are both biblically. And scientifically untenable. And secondly. The struggle for justice.

[20 : 30] And equality. Must be carried out. Not just in the realm. Of white debate. And discussion. But in concrete demonstration. To the black community. Blacks today.

Do not want the paternalistic. And patronizing charity. Of the whites. They rightly demand. Full justice. And equal consideration. As partners. In a new. Multiracial South Africa. Talk of love.

And concern. Is totally inadequate. Rarely. If ever. In the gospels. Do we. Read of the Lord himself. Protesting his love.

Towards people. He did not have to tell people. That he loved them. For he gave such a powerful. Demonstration of his love. That it was self-evident. And the cross. Of course itself. Demonstrates.

The love. Solidarity. And self-sacrifice. Which not only satisfied. The just demands. Of a righteous God. But is also intended. To exert a powerful.

[21 : 24] Moral influence. Over all believers. As they seek to live. A Christ-like life. The blacks of South Africa. Must be treated as human beings. Living in an open. And free society.

Where they can walk. With their heads up. Like the prophets. Of the scriptures. The church has the duty. To denounce tyranny. And national leaders. Cost what it may. But it is also.

Under obligation. To demonstrate truth. And love. In its fellowship. Where the multiracial nature. Of the kingdom of God. Can be seen in action. We can only be encouraged. That in this regard.

At least. The Dutch reformed church. Is now giving its people. A nation. That long awaited. Challenge. And lead. To biblical thinking. In a recent paper.

They are calling the church. Not just to orthodoxy. Not just to right belief. But also to orthopraxis. To the right practice. Of justice. The error of racism.

[22 : 17] Must be exposed. By denying. That there is any scriptural warrant. For the belief. That God makes his covenant. With nations. On the basis of nationality. And that the resultant confusion. Between church and nation.

Is erroneous. In its recently published. Church and society. A testimony. Of the Dutch reformed church. Published in Pretoria. Last year. We read the following. To fulfill its calling to God.

To itself and to society. And to lend credibility. To its proclamation. The very existence of the church. Must be a visible symbol. And concrete expression. Of the kingdom of God.

For all sectors of society. The church. Must be a living window. Of what God. In his grace accomplishes. How he renews relationships. How he grants reconciliation.

Mutual understanding. And peace. How he transforms suspicion. Into brotherly love. End of quote. The church must not fail. To make it clear. That it is not only the black people.

[23 : 16] Who are the victims of apartheid. But the very advocates. And perpetrators. Of such a vicious system. Are by their support of it. Dehumanizing themselves. As they cause the degradation.

Of their fellow citizens. Secondly. I would like to think with you. Of the diversity. And complexity of mankind. Having looked at the unity of mankind. And perhaps some application. To current concerns.

Now look at the diversity. And complexity of mankind. Now we see that with the rest. Of creation. The Lord has displayed. A rich diversity. Of shape. And colour. And form.

You can go into any bookshop. And you can pick up. Marvelously illustrated field guides. To birds. And butterflies. And flowers. And trees. And their eloquent testimony.

To the rich creation. And the diverse creation. Of the Lord. It would be most unusual. To find man. The crown and pinnacle. Of God's creative acts.

[24 : 14] To be alone. The victim of dull uniformity. And of course. We are not disappointed. The rich variety. Seen elsewhere. Is reflected also. In the family of man. Whilst we cannot describe.

Strict scientific status. To the terms. Tribes. Tongues. Peoples. Nations. Kingdoms. And multitudes. They nevertheless. Convey to us. A very clear. And vivid impression.

Of the ethno-linguistic. Complexity. Of mankind. However. In view of what we have already said. About the essential unity of mankind. We are forced to ask a question.

Whence. All this diversity. If. If. The whole human race. Is descended from Adam and Eve. How is it. That there is. Such a. A vast diversity. Amongst the human family.

How do we account. For the various. Races. Their languages. And their cultures. And I think. In trying to come to. An answer to that question. The first thing is to consider.

[25 : 11] Environmental factors. In Genesis 1. 28. The so called cultural mandate. We see here. Spelled out. Man's primary obligations. In terms of cultivating.

The potential of his environment. In increasing the world population. And in ruling over the creation. It is clear from this expression. Of God's will. That man was to utilize.

Every hospitable environment. On the planet. By the very nature. Of the diversity. Of that habitat. From fertile valleys. To the less hospitable mountains. Deserts and forests.

Man's history and culture. Would inevitably. Be heavily influenced. By his locality. In relative isolation. From others. And under the special constraints. Of developing technologies.

Art forms. And communicational needs. Language. Always a dynamic entity. Would adjust. And specialize. To cope with prevailing needs. And therefore. We can see. How a diversity.

- [26 : 06] Could quite easily. Have evolved. It is not difficult. To imagine. That something like today's. Ethno-linguistic diversity. Could have naturally evolved. As man was obedient. To the cultural mandate. However. A gentle. A gentle. And natural development. Perhaps retaining. Some degree. Of mutual. Understandability. Nevertheless. Did not materialize. And so. We have to consider. What we could call. Judgmentally. Accelerated diversity. Due to the proud. And rebellious nature. Of post-Diluvian society. With its preoccupation. With reputation. Building. And solidarity. Divine judgment. Was meted out. The narrative. Of Genesis 11. Is familiar to us all. Under this judgment. The tower builders. Were dispersed. By a confusion. Of tongues. Just. How many linguistic variants. Were then produced. We don't know. Candlish. Was of the opinion. That it may only.
- [27 : 00] Have been three. From which basis. All modern languages. Stem. Be that as it may. Candlish. Is undoubtedly correct. In his assessment. Of the tower builders. Sin. And I quote from his studies. In Genesis. He said. It was an act of daring rebellion. Against the most high. And in particular. Against his prerogative. Of dividing to the nations. Their inheritance. Being avowedly intended. For the very purpose. Of preventing. The orderly dispersion. Which God. Had manifestly appointed. Now this scattering. Of the family of man. At Babel. Was not. As is sometimes stated. A confusion. It was the tongues. That were confused. The scattering. Was not diffused. It was not. Confused. It was. In fact. As you look at. The narrative. A methodical dispersal. And migration. Out from the plain. Of Shinar. To the north. Trekking Japheth.
- [27 : 53] And his family. To the south. Ham. While Shem settled. In the central belt. Which included. The land flowing. With milk and honey. Later to be the portion. Of the descendants. Of Abraham. Through Isaac. As a result. Of these great migrations. The earth came. To be populated. The cultures of man. Richly diversified. But. And. It is here. That judgment. Is most profoundly expressed. The task. Of taking the gospel. To all mankind. Was made. All the more difficult. It is. To this divine ordering. Of human society. That the apostle. Refers. In his Areopagus address. When he states. That they should inhabit. The whole earth. And he. God. Determined. The exact places. Where they should live. Act 17:26. So let's look a little then. At this. Ethnolinguistic diversity. As an example. Of the present. Ethnolinguistic complexity. That creates.
- [28 : 47] So many barriers. To cross cultural. Missionary activity. We can cite. The example of. Europe. As described. In the Encyclopedia Britannica. The find in 1974. Macropedia. Volume 6. Page. 1122. Which divides Europe. Into four major cultural areas. It's just Europe. 22 cultural provinces. And 158. Distinct languages. Or consider. For example. The Caucasian races. 660 languages. The Mongoloid peoples. 1,700 languages. Or the Negroid peoples. 1,660 languages. And each language. Enshrines. A particular ethos. And a culture. This is the greatest issue. That is facing the church. As it seeks to communicate. The gospel. Throughout the world. What separates men. From the gospel.

- [29 : 41] Apart from their fallenness. Of course. Is not geographical distance. But cultural distance. Now missiologists. And cultural anthropologists. Have contrived a way.
- To express this distance. Between cultures. By a code. Which describes. The number of barriers. That a person. Must cross. To communicate. Adequately. With people.
- Of another culture. The encyclopedia. Of Christianity. Uses a system. Based on values. 0 to 6. For example. I'm reasonably confident.
- In my facts. I stand to be corrected. For example. A middle class. Scotsman. From Edinburgh. Communicating. With a middle class. Scotsman. From Perth. But of no. Cultural barriers. To cross.
- And therefore. We express the cultural distance. As C0. If however. Our middle class. Scotsman. From Edinburgh. Wishes to communicate. The gospel. With a Gaelic.
- [30 : 36] Speaking crofter. From the outer isles. Then the cultural distance. Would be expressed. As C1. There's that one language barrier. That has to be crossed. Whereas a British missionary. Seeking. To.
- Speak. To a Nigerian. Egalo. Subsistence farmer. Would have to cross. Many cultural. And linguistic. Frontiers. And so the distance. Would be expressed. As C6. Other systems.
- Of evaluating. The distance. Between cultures. Include Ralph Winters. Found in his essay. The highest priority. Cross cultural evangelism. In the volume. Of papers.
- And responses. Of the Lausanne Congress. Let the earth hear his voice. And David J. Hesselgrave. Has got some very helpful material. On this subject. In his book. Planting churches. Cross culturally.
- And I think the great benefit. Of it all. Is just to remind us. Of the difficulty. Of communicating with people. We mustn't take it for granted. That because we have. Some superficial knowledge.
- [31 : 29] Of another person's culture. Perhaps even language. That it is easy for us. To bridge. The distances. It would be folly. I believe. To disregard the wealth.
- Of helpful material. On this subject. Enabling us to appreciate. Just how great. The ethno-linguistic. Divides are. And how culturally sensitive. We need to be. If we hope to preach.
- The gospel in terms. People understand. It is naive. To believe. That the preacher's task. Is simply to repeat. The word. As it is written down. In scripture. That is so.
- You better stay at home. And send portions of scripture. Through the post. Instead. The preacher missionary. Goes forth. To become immersed. In the life of his fellows. So that he can.
- Through his personality. Bring the gospel. To bear upon specific people. Whose outlook. Values. Attitudes. And aspirations. Are largely formed. By the culture.
- [32 : 23] In which they live. And so that brings us. To the point. Of considering this need. For cultural sensitivity. That the apostles. Were sensitive. To the diversity. Of cultures. That form the media.
- Of their ministry. Can be seen. By the distinctive. Emphasis. In their preaching. The arrangement. Of material. And particular stresses. Of truth. Were different. When they preached. To a Jewish congregation. For example. Compared to their preaching.
- In a Gentile context. Without in any way. Jeopardising the message itself. Their preaching. Was self-consciously. Carried on. In a specific. Cultural context.

In a word. It was contextualised. Preaching. Now to be sure. This term is currently. A very loaded one. To some. It expresses. The very essence. Of cross-cultural ministry. Whilst others.

Suspect. That contextualisation. Is some kind. Of clandestine synonym. For syncretism. In fact. The term itself. Is neutral. And helpful. In expressing.

[33 : 19] The need. For careful adaptation. To the prevailing. Customs and culture. Of the people. To whom we witness. The discussion. The discussion. Centering on. Conceptualisation. Has become necessary.

Due to the often. Crass insensitivity. And ignorance. Of foreign. Western missionaries. Eric Wright. In his little book. Tell the world. Points out. That in a survey. Of over 5,000 Christian workers.

In India. Many of whom. Were Western missionaries. Over a half. Said. That it was not necessary. To know anything. About Hinduism. Or Islam. To be an effective worker. In India.

And I can well remember. When we were in Nigeria. A veteran missionary. Who when staying. In our home in Nigeria. Expressed concern. And alarm. Over what she perceived. To be the presence of evil. One evening.

She fancied. That she detected. This presence of evil. When one moonlit night. She could hear. The local young people. Down in the marketplace. Singing folk songs.

[34 : 14] Accompanied by drums. Her sense of unease. I believe. Was to be attributed. Much more to her lack. Of acculturation. Than anything demonic. Going on that night. But with moonlit nights.

Drums. A childhood diet. Of romantic. Colonial. Missionary tales. And a good imagination. Anything could have been going on. Down there. They could have had a missionary. In the pot. For all that she knew. And I think she believed.

That they nearly had. It was the same missionary. Who constantly had problems. With household servants. Because she failed to realise. That taking a young person.

Into one's household. Meant according to the local custom. That you accepted responsibility. For them as your own children. When they helped themselves. To a spoonful or two of sugar. Or a biscuit. Or the remains of a prepared meal.

She considered it. To have been stolen. Branded these young people. As thieves. Dismissed them from a service. And if they were involved. In the life of the church at all. So. To have them disciplined. By the local.

[35 : 11] Kirk session. And the degree of hostility. Thus created. Served to negate. Most. If not all. Of any Christian influence. She fancied. That she had over them.

Now. One highly significant. Response. To the need. For cultural sensitivity. Is that. Associated. With the name of. Professor Donald McGovern. And the Institute of Church. Growth.

The Fuller Theological Seminary. In Pasadena. Dr. McGovern has. For more than 30 years. Called the church. To take seriously. The fact of the diversity. Of mankind. And gear its missionary.

And evangelistic activities. Accordingly. The fundamental principle. That seems to underlie. His teaching. Is the so called. Homogenous unit principle. Put simply. It is that.

Congregationally speaking. Like. Attracts like. According to McGovern. The task of missions. Is to win men to Christ. And incorporate them. In congregations. Without requiring them.

- [36 : 06] To cross boundaries. To the church. From their own. Particular homogenous unit. Churches should be. According to McGovern. Monoethnic. Comprised largely. Of those from a single. Social. And cultural background. McGovern is wary. Of any approach. That means. And I quote him here. Becoming a Christian. Means. Leaving our people. And joining. Those foreigners.
- Citing the Indian experience. He says. And I quote him again. Evangelism. Will seek to bring. Those who believe. Into congregations. Made up. Of their own. Kith. And kin.
- His volume. On ethnic realities. In the church. Lessons from India. Is well worth reading. On this subject. Do not agree with all of it. I'm quite sure of that. But it is a very helpful. And enlightening book.
- The concern of Dr. McGovern. Is well expressed. In words of his. He says. As I read the future. Many homogenous units. Are fighting. A losing battle. Against the tide. In human affairs. They will eventually go.
- [37 : 04] Larger and larger. Racial and linguistic. Unities appear. Appear likely. But homogenous units. Are here now. And are likely to be here. For a long time. Let the church. Disciple. Each of them. Out to the fringes. Operate with them. And preserve the richness. Of their cultures. And as far as it can. Mitigate the antipathy. Which arises. Between bodies of men.
- And promote love and justice. Between all men. The church. Working thus. With the homogenous unit. And not against it. Will liberate. The multitudinous ethnic units. Of mankind. Into the glorious liberty.
- Of the children. Of God. Now it's become. Almost fashionable. In reformed circles. Of late. To dismiss the church. Growth school of thought. As seriously flawed.
- And there are. I believe indeed. Biblical inconsistencies. And misemphasies. And perhaps less than careful. Exegesis. But we would. I believe. Do well. To ponder. Many of the helpful insights.
- [38 : 01] That Dr. McGavran gives us. At least. Let us form our views. Of what he is trying to say. From his own works. Rather than from his critics. And detractors. In increasing our sensitivity.
- To cultural realities. And the ethno-linguistic complexity. Of our world. He has much to teach us. Professor Harvey Kahn. Of Westminster Theological Seminary. Would have us. Thank God.
- For this man who. And I quote Harvey Kahn. Whose continuous. Almost relentless. Reminder to us. Is that the business of missions. Is the planting. Of the church.
- Now having entered that caveat. On his behalf. We have to say. We feel that McGavran. Encourages the church. In a misuse of the knowledge. Of that social. Socioanthropological science.
- Instead of using. The homogenous unit. Principle. To sharpen our perception. Of those to whom. We aim the gospel. It has been misapplied. As a principle. Of church development.
- [38 : 59] Although. Great sensitivity. Is needed. To appreciate the barriers. That lie. Between unconverted men. And membership. Of the church. We do not wish to add. To the offense. Of the gospel. We cannot.
- However. Permit the church. To be imprisoned. In any human culture. Or any set of traditions. Invariably. Tainted by sin. The goal. For the church.
- Local as well as universal. Is summed up. Clearly. In the apostles. Teaching. In Ephesians 2. Verses 11 to 22. For example. Where he summarizes.

It in these words. That it is the Lord's purpose. To create one new man. Out of two. Out of the diversity. Of the human race. To bring. All together. Into one. New man.

In the epistles. The church. So often. Is depicted. As something. Very fragile. An almost. Unstable. Creation. Composed. Of members. Drawn from diverse.

[39 : 53] Backgrounds. Who are. And I quote. To make every effort. To keep the unity. Of the spirit. Through the bond of peace. The injunction. For example. So just. Heaven. Romans 15. Verse 7. We are to receive one another.

As Christ received us. To the glory of God. But of little application. In a mono-ethnic congregation. But would be a. Foundational teaching. In congregations.

Composed of Jews. And Gentiles. Greeks. And barbarians. Slaves. And masters. Rich. And poor. Those early congregations. Which fail to identify.

With God's multicultural objective. Those established. Within a strongly defined. Mono-cultural context. Namely the Jewish congregations. Soon cease to exist. The tendency.

Of mono-ethnic congregations. Is to become exclusivist. They are thus often. Perceived to be unattractive. Even unfriendly. To those outside. The homogenous unit.

[40 : 47] And. Themselves having little concern. For those outside. Because they become very insular. And narrow. In their outlook. The demise of such congregations. Is never far off.

For as Emil Brunner rightly observed. Missions are the life blood. Of the church. Suspend them. And she swoons. Stop them. And she dies. Nevertheless.

The rich diversity. Of human culture. Is not to be obliterated. Or merged. Into some kind of. Christian cultural fusion. It is not a new monoculture. That we are to seek.

But a true multicultural. Multiracial. Multinational church. A church in which. No one is required. To break away. From their ethno-linguistic. Or cultural roots.

But one in which. All cultures. Will find acceptance. And respect. And where distinctive. Contributions that arise. Within those cultures. Will be welcome. I well remember. Speaking.

[41 : 42] About these things. To some elders. Out in Nigeria. And one of the elders. Said in the course. Of the conversation. That he was rather pleased.

To hear this kind of emphasis. Because he well remembered. The day when the missionaries. First came. And through no fault. Of the missionaries. Through nothing. That they had said. He somehow. Got it into his head.

That when going to church. He had to have an appearance. Something like the missionaries. Themselves. They wore European trousers. And European shirt. And a tie. Now these Igarla men. Had their grand robes on.

And when he went to church. He said. As young fellows. We used to gather up. Our big robes. And we used to tuck them. Into our trousers. And it must have looked. Bizarre. To see those men. Making their way. Into church.

They felt that they had to deny. The culture they had been. Brought up in. To deny. Their own. Particular. Racial contribution. The old cultural self-consciousness.

[42 : 40] With its chauvinism. And alienation. Must give way. To a culture. Race. And colour transcending. Love and acceptance. It was encouraging. To notice the Pasadena report. Of the Lausanne movement. In 1977.

Expressing concern. Over the homogenous unit. Congregations. In the following words. They said. A homogenous unit church. Can be a legitimate. And authentic church. Yet if it remains in isolation.

It cannot reflect. The universality. And diversity. Of the body of Christ. Therefore. Every homogenous unit church. Must take active steps. To broaden its fellowship.

In order to demonstrate. Visibly. The unity and variety. Of Christ's church. And that's the end of the quote. With such a goal in mind. The apostle could write. To the Ephesians.

These words. Consequently. He said. You are no longer. Foreigners and aliens. But fellow citizens. With God's people. And members. Of God's household. The inescapable corollary.

[43 : 35] Of embracing the gospel. And thereby experiencing. Union and fellowship. With God. Is that I am united. To all other believers. And stand with them. On an identical basis.

Of equality and worth. I am obligated. To seek to extirpate. All traces. Of any lingering racism. Traditionalism. Or cultural bias. That threatens.

The harmony. And peace of the church. Among the things. I must renounce. In becoming a disciple. Are those ties of blood. And kinship. Which would take precedence. Over my new identity.

Among the citizens. Of citizens of heaven. Our Lord preached that. We must be prepared. To leave those. Who are kith and kin. In coming to him. And the apostle Paul.

Also. Emphasized this. In his. Own response. To his gospel ministry. In Philippians chapter 3. Puts it like this.

[44 : 30] He says. If anyone else. Thinks he has reasons. To put confidence in the flesh. I have more. Circumcised on the eighth day. Of the people of Israel. Of the tribe of Benjamin. A Hebrew of Hebrews.

In regard to the law. A Pharisee. As for zeal persecuting. The church. As for legalistic righteousness. Faultless. Unimpeccable pedigree indeed. But he said.

Whatever was to my profit. I now consider loss. For the sake of Christ. What is more. I consider everything. A loss. Compared to the surpassing greatness. Of knowing Christ Jesus.

My Lord. For whose sake. I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish. That I may gain Christ. For the fact. That this was his descent.

That he was a Jew. That the blessings. Of the covenant. Were his. And yet. In terms of. The ethno. Linguistic. Background. That he had inherited.

[45 : 25] He was prepared to. Call it rubbish. Worthless. If it was in any way. Going to hold him back. In his pursuit of Christ. And fellowship. Within the church.

Well. By way of postscript. Let's just have a little look. At the uniqueness. Of the individual. We've looked at the. Unity of the human race. We've looked at the. Diversity. Of mankind. Now a little.

About the uniqueness. Of the individual. It's not. It's an addendum. To what we've been considering. But I think important. That we mention it. The biblical doctrine of race. Teaches us of both. The unity.

And the great diversity. Of mankind. A Christian. In seeking to evangelise. The human race. Is obligated. To conserve. The harmony. And respect. The distinctions. He finds.

In the family of man. Yet in a very real sense. The gospel. Is never addressed. To stereotypes. From within the world's cultures. It is addressed. To individuals. It is not the human race.

[46 : 19] As such. Nor yet the diverse units. Within the human race. That bears the image of God. That image is impressed. Upon the nature. And character. Of the individual. Though each man.

Stands in organic solidarity. With the rest of mankind. It is not the human race. En masse. That will stand. Before the judgment seat. Of Christ. But rather. Each individual. Accounts for his.

Or her sinfulness. It is not families. Clans. Tribes. Or some other homogenous unit. That comes in repentance. And faith. To receive salvation. It is men and women.

As individuals. It may be individuals. Within a society. It may be individuals. Affecting others. Within their group. But it is as individuals. That men and women. Come to faith. The importance of this fact.

Cannot be overstated. The gospel. Is never addressed. To the Jews. It is never addressed. To the Muslims. It is never addressed. To the Hindus. The stereotype.

[47 : 14] Does not in fact exist. Only individuals exist. With their idiosyncrasies. Their inconsistencies. And their distinctive characteristics. For example.

The Christian approach. To the Jew. May well be a fascinating exercise. In theoretical missiology. But the Jew. Idealistically conceived. Does not exist. In the words.

Of the Israeli comedian. Who when asked. If he was an orthodox Jew. He replied by saying. Oh no. He said. I'm only Jewish. And the same applies everywhere. People are never as consistent.

As the theoretical position. We would like to slot them into. J.H. Bavinck. In words that should be. Written indelibly. In our memories. Puts it so well. He says.

Abstract. Disembodied. And history-less sinners. Do not exist. Only very concrete. Sinners exist. Whose sinful life. Is determined. And characterized.

[48 : 08] By all sorts of cultural. And historical factors. By poverty. Hunger. Superstition. Traditions. Chronic illnesses. Tribal morality. And thousands of other things.

I must bring the gospel. Of God's grace. In Jesus Christ. To the whole man. In his concrete existence. In his everyday environment. The content of God's word.

Itself teaches me. That I must. Seriously consider. The person. To whom I would direct myself. Under no circumstances. These are words. Well worthy of note. Under no circumstances.

May I present. The word of God. In general. Abstract. Timeless formulas. Addressed to no one. As an ambassador. Of the living Christ. I must direct myself. To living people.

And I must earnestly. Consider them as persons. In all their circumstances. And in all their traits. Of character. And you'll find that. In an introduction. To the science of missions. Pages 81 to 83.

[49 : 04] It is interesting. To notice. That such a lack of interest. In the concrete situation. Which men find themselves. Is identifiable. In the writings. Of Karl Barth. In some evangelical.

And reformed circles. It is not at all unusual. To be reminded. That man is the same. As ever he was. That the gospel. Is unchanged. And all we need to do. Is preach. Its timeless truths.

Such an emphasis. Finds full expression. In Barth's homiletics. Where he denies. That man's real situation. Is the historical one. He finds himself in. His real situation.

He says. Is as he is before God. However. We do not need to accept. This dialectic. For there is no contradiction. Between man. And his historical. Cultural situation. And his situation.

Before God. There is nothing. To stop us. From being faithful. Both to the text. And to life. To preach. Without due sensitivity. To the context. Of preaching. And to become concerned.

- [50 : 00] Only with the content. Of preaching. Will lead to a stifling. Irrelevance. In one sense. We do start from the text. Which determines our message. But in another sense. We start. With the hearers. And we ask ourselves. What is the message. That I must preach. Into this. Particular situation. This sensitivity. To and empathy. With others. Is of the very essence.
- Of evangelism. Intercultural. And cross-cultural. At home and abroad. The ability to sit. Where they sit. To identify. Means far more. Than learning to speak. A foreign language. And having a theoretical knowledge. Of a people's history. And social customs. The identification. We must aim at. Is analogical. Of Christ's identification. With us. We've been reminded.
- Twice already. In the course of this. School of the. Chapter two. Of Philipians. Let this mind. Be in you. That speaks of Christ's. Condescension. To the. To the cross.
- [50 : 52] That he might. Win sinners. To himself. And it was. This incarnational. Identification. That the great. Missionary apostle. Himself. Sought to emulate. Writing in.
- First Corinthians. Chapter nine. And at verse 16. He says this. Yet he said. When I preach the gospel. I cannot boast. For I am compelled. To preach. Woe is. Woe to me. If I do not preach the gospel.
- If I preach. Voluntarily. I have a reward. If not voluntary. I am simply. Discharging the trust. Committed to me. What then is my reward? Just this. That in preaching the gospel. I may offer it.
- Free of charge. And so not make use of my rights. In preaching it. And then he goes on to say. Though I am free. And belong to no man. I make myself a slave. To everyone.
- To win as many as possible. To the Jews. I became like a Jew. To win the Jews. To those under the law. I became like one. Under the law. Though I myself. Am not under the law. So as to win those under the law.
- [51 : 49] To those not having the law. I became like one not having the law. Though I am not free from God's law. But I am under Christ's law. So as to win those not having the law.
- To the weak I became weak. To win the weak. I have become all things to all men. That by all possible means. I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel.
- That I may share in its blessings. As George W. Peters reminds us. The missionary task is a human task. He has said.
- God has chosen human instruments. To accomplish his task in human hearts. Within a human society. Surrounded by a human environment. Humanism and theological liberalism.
- No doubt. Have over emphasised this factor. And have made missions. Almost totally anthropocentric. And philanthropic. Evangelical Christianity. To a great extent. Has underestimated.
- [52 : 49] This vital fact.