A Pneumatological Theology of Diversity

JOHN KENNETH GIBSON*

After years of effort, racial and ethnic diversity remain a challenge for the church. Practical and constructive theologies of diversity generally depend upon the person and teaching of Christ and ignore the unifying work of the Holy Spirit. The eucharistic assembly, one of the most segregated of gatherings in the United States, must incarnate the diversity of the first Spirit-infused Pentecost to proclaim the kingdom of God. The church is not a static institution; rather, it is a living body, guided by the Spirit to its fulfillment in the other and in the eschatological assembly (Revelation 7:9).

Introduction

Diversity has been a buzz word in American society for the last two decades, and churches have increasingly joined the movement. Yet despite this growing interest within the church, little has been written about a theology of diversity, and the theologies that have appeared tend to be grounded in Christology rather than pneumatology. This essay posits that a racially and ethnically diverse ecclesiology must also be rooted pneumatologically. The Spirit is the enlivening principle of unity and diversity.1 The cacophony of Babel becomes the polyphony of Jerusalem at Pentecost through the Holy Spirit unifying the disparate nations.

The polyphony of Jerusalem, although manifested at Pentecost, will only be fully realized in the eschaton. The church, called to incarnate the diverse unity of the eschatological banquet, seeks its ultimate reality in the new Jerusalem. Church diversity slogans such as Radical Welcome, for all their rhetorical force, therefore, misstate the reality.

* John Kenneth Gibson serves as the Senior Associate Rector at St. Michael’s Episcopal Church, Raleigh, North Carolina. The author wishes to thank Geoffrey Wainwright and Karina Robson, who critiqued drafts of this article.

The church is not the welcoming one, radical or otherwise; rather, the church is the one striving for its fruition that is found in the alterity of the other.

**Ecclesial and Sociological Background**

Race and ethnicity rive society and the church synchronically and diachronically. In the 1990s, so-called ethnic cleansing led to the deaths of more than a million people in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda. In the United States, Martin Luther King said in 1963 during a question and answer session at Western Michigan University, “We must face the fact that in America, the church is still the most segregated major institution in America. At 11:00 on Sunday morning when we stand and sing and [sic] Christ has no east or west, we stand at the most segregated hour in this nation.” Little has changed in almost fifty years. In a study of social survey data from 1978 to 1994, Philip Q. Yang and Starlita Smith concluded, “Progress in black-white church integration had been very sluggish or almost non-existent if socio-economic, political, and demographic variables are held constant.”

In his recent book *Church Diversity*, Scott Williams observes, “When Dr. King so eloquently shared his dreams in the famous ‘I Have a Dream’ speech, he shared his dreams that ‘little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.’ We are still dreaming and that dream still has not come true for the Church.” The church at the congregational level remains highly segregated.

While the local church remains segregated, American society is becoming increasingly diverse, racially and ethnically. A report released by the Congressional Research Service in 2011 stated:

Once a mainly biracial society with a large white majority and relatively small black minority—and an impenetrable color line dividing these groups—the United States is now a society composed

---


4 Scott Williams, *Church Diversity: Sunday, the Most Segregated Day of the Week* (Green Forest, Ark.: New Leaf Publishing Group, 2011), 23.
of multiple racial and ethnic groups. Along with increased immigration are rises in the rates of racial/ethnic intermarriage, which in turn have led to a sizeable and growing multiracial population. These trends are projected to continue for the next decades.\(^5\)

In response to this increasingly diverse landscape, many churches are working to diversify their membership.

These efforts can be seen in two ecclesial communities at opposite ends of the theological and political spectrum: the Episcopal Church and the Southern Baptist Convention. Michael Curry, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina, in his January 23, 2009 pastoral address to diocesan convention stated, “I have a hope, a dream, and a prayer for us, the Episcopal Diocese of North Carolina. It is that when we mark our 200th anniversary in the year 2017—just eight years from now—the face of the Episcopal Church here will reflect the face of the peoples of North Carolina in all of our variety and God-given diversity.”\(^6\) The executive committee and other leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) at its 2011 meeting in Phoenix signed an Affirmation of Unity and Cooperation saying, “We pledge to embrace our brothers and sisters of every ethnicity, race, and language as equal partners in our collective ministries to engage all people groups with the gospel of Jesus Christ.”\(^7\) Confronted with declining membership and growing ethnic and racial diversity in the nation, SBC leaders say they must work to include other racial and ethnic groups in leadership roles.\(^8\)

These efforts for greater diversity within their denominations were justified by Episcopal and SBC leaders in christological terms, as they articulated their arguments for a diverse congregational life experienced in and through the person of Jesus Christ. In his address to diocesan convention, Curry offered a concatenation of Scriptures arguing for universality because of Christ’s teaching and action: “Come

---


to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). “My house shall be called a house of prayer for all the nations” (Mark 11:17). “I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself” (John 12:32). Three times Curry quoted Matthew 28:19–20, Jesus’ command to “make disciples of all nations.” He then summed up these passages by saying, “All really means all. There is no footnote qualifying it, no parenthesis circumscribing it, no asterisk mitigating it. All really means all. All are welcome!”

Curry went on to connect Christ’s universality to the church’s diversity through the teaching of Anglican biblical scholar Richard A. Burridge, who in *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics* argues that the key to the church’s diversity is found by imitating Jesus Christ. Curry stated:

In his study Professor Burridge argues, quite rightly I believe, that the imitation of Christ, by which he means living out Jesus’ teachings and emulating his example, is the essence of what it means to be a disciple, a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ in the community of the baptized. Professor Burridge goes on to say that where and when a group of people, baptized and living into the reality of God, truly strives to imitate Jesus of Nazareth by living his teachings and following his example, then an inclusive and diverse missionary community arises and takes form—because people of all kinds will come to follow Jesus.

Mimesis of Jesus, therefore, is the key for ecclesial and congregational diversity.

Although the SBC did not offer an explanation for its affirmation, it did provide three substantiating biblical passages. Each of the scriptural warrants included the word “all,” as did the ones proffered by Curry. The first citation was Matthew 28:19. The second was Romans 16:25–27:

Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but is now disclosed, and through the prophetic writings is made known to all

---

9 Curry, “All Are Welcome,” 129.
10 Curry, “All Are Welcome,” 129.
A Pneumatological Theology of Diversity 433

the Gentiles, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith—to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever! Amen.

The final one was Revelation 7:9, “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.” These three passages are not only universalistic, but christocentric. Each one explicitly refers to Jesus Christ. Thus the scriptural and theological bases for diversity within these two dissimilar faith communities were remarkably similar.

Theological Rationales for Diversity

A growing body of practical theological literature on diversity or multiculturalism also roots itself in the person of Jesus Christ. Most texts fall under the heading of congregational development, offering suggestions for how to establish a diverse congregation. In *Inclusion: Making Room for Grace*, the Episcopal priest and consultant Eric H. F. Law cites numerous passages from the Gospels and the Book of Acts about the life of Jesus and from the Pauline epistles about the early church to argue for inclusivity.¹¹ Evangelical pastor Scott Williams bases his argument in *Church Diversity* on the inclusive nature of the early church, noting that this inclusivity was at the behest of Jesus’ command in Acts 1:8 to witness “to the ends of the earth.”¹² In *Radical Welcome: Embracing God, The Other, and the Spirit of Transformation*, Episcopal priest Stephanie Spellers argues for diversity based on the person of Jesus and the transformative nature of God.¹³ Spellers makes a Trinitarian case, contending, based upon the divine perichoresis, that God’s relational nature “propels God into creation, where God yearns for relationship with us all and draws us beyond our barriers into relationship with each other.”¹⁴ She then develops this line of reasoning in terms of the Incarnation, in which “God takes that intimate relationship another radical step forward” by

¹² Williams, *Church Diversity*, 23–24.  
sharing “everything about our condition” and inviting us to join Christ “in the divine union he has shared with his Abba God from the beginning of time.”¹⁵ Mark Lau Branson and Juan F. Martínez’s *Churches, Cultures, and Leadership: A Practical Theology of Congregations and Ethnicities* differs from the other works in contending that the Holy Spirit achieves the work of cultural inclusion. Branson, a Pentecostal, and Martínez, an Anabaptist, in referring to the time of Pentecost, state: “The Holy Spirit guides and empowers the church to break out of the homogeneous social units of that era.”¹⁶

If the primary practical theological argument for ecclesial diversity is christological, the same is true in many constructive theological works. Constructive theological works do employ the Holy Spirit more frequently in their arguments for diversity, but ultimately to little effect. Free Methodist Dan Sheffield’s “Toward a Theology of Diversity” argues for diversity primarily from the Pauline epistles and the image of the body of Christ. He states that the Spirit works to provide equal access to God the Father and to bring people into the body of Christ, but he does not argue that diversity has been achieved through the work of the Spirit.¹⁷ Methodist theologian Jung Young Lee, in *Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology*, writes, “Jesus-Christ as Spirit who transcends temporal and spatial limitations must become the locus of our church and the basis for our existence as a community of marginal people.”¹⁸ Lee asserts that on Pentecost the new community found a “common core” around the Spirit, but the basis of a diverse faith community seems to be found in the indwelling of the Trinity. “I am in the Father and the Father is in me” (John 14:11); the Spirit is sent “in the name” of Jesus (John 14:26). Reformed theologian Jürgen Moltmann, in his most recent work *Sun of Righteousness, Arise!: God’s Future for Humanity and the Earth*, after reviewing monarchical, christological, and pneumatological paradigms of the church, bases the unity of the people of God in the Trinity. Moltmann’s substantiating biblical references cite the Son or

---

¹⁵ Spellers, *Radical Welcome*, 34.
¹⁶ Mark Lau Branson and Juan F. Martínez, *Churches, Cultures, and Leadership: A Practical Theology of Congregations and Ethnicities* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2011), 38.
the Father but not the Spirit. Catholic theologian Joseph A. Komonchak, in his essay “The Theology of the Local Church: State of the Question,” reasons ecclesiologically via pronouncements of the Catholic Church such as *Lumen Gentium*. He mentions the paradigm of Pentecost and the Holy Spirit as the unifying agent of the church, but the foundation of Komonchak’s argument is finally summed up in the statement “all are one in Christ.”

Christology unarguably has an important place in any theology of diversity. Jesus interacted with people of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds: “A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and Jesus said to her, ‘Give me a drink’” (John 4:7). He traveled beyond Jewish territory: “Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis” (Mark 7:31). He lifted up the example of faith in those who were outside of his own tradition: “I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith” (Luke 7:9). Jesus also struggled with whether to minister to outsiders: “I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel” (Matt. 15:24). Christ reconciled humans to one another and to God through his atoning death on the cross: “And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself” (John 12:32). Jesus’ life and teachings are a testimony for inclusiveness. A theology that rests solely upon a christological foundation, though, ignores to its detriment the unifying power of the third person of the Trinity and runs the risk of falling, as has happened all too often, into a christomonistic, or Christ only, institutionalism that ultimately objectifies the other.

**The Homogeneous Unit Principle Counter Argument**

The main theological argument against racially and ethnically diverse congregations is missiological. In 1970 the Disciples of Christ missionary Donald A. McGavran argued, based upon his experience in India, that “it takes no great acumen to see that when marked differences of color, stature, income, cleanliness, and education are present, unbelievers understand the gospel better when expounded by their own kind of people. They prefer to join churches whose

---


members look, talk, and act like themselves.”21 Here McGavran is articulating what James C. Smith called in his 1976 doctoral dissertation the “homogeneous unit” principle.22

McGavran, whose influential work spawned the church growth movement, defended this principle, citing the work of Michael Novak. “Michael Novak, in his perceptive book The Rise of the Unmelttable Ethnics, ably defends the right of each ethnic group to remain itself. He sees the barriers each group builds around itself as normal and desirable parts of the human scene.”23 McGavran saw the homogeneous unit principle not as an ecclesial end but simply as a tool for conversion. He knew the dangers of racial and ethnic animosities, and thought the church needed to ameliorate them. Proclamation of the gospel, nonetheless, took a higher priority. “The one thing the church will not do—on the basis that it is self-defeating—is to substitute kindness and friendliness for the gospel. It knows that brotherhood is the fruit and the gospel is the root.”24 Diversity, according to the homogeneous unit principle, is realized not in any one congregation but in the sum of the congregations.

McGavran’s homogeneous unit principle is problematic on numerous grounds, including its definition of the gospel, the ranking of Christian charity, and the effectiveness of such conversions. Although Jesus proclaimed the kingdom of God and called people to repentance, the kingdom came spatially in his person (Mark 1:15). The composition of the body of Christ cannot be considered second order since the Word became flesh (John 1:14). It is not simply a means to an end, however good that end. The body of Christ in and of itself is the proclamation of the gospel. This is not to say that a homogeneous faith community fails to proclaim the gospel. Some congregations may be racially and ethnically homogeneous due to a lack of diversity in the local population. The goal of homogeneous units, though, fails to accord with the vision of the body of Christ as proclaimed and instituted at Pentecost by the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1–42). The eschatological vision of the people of God, as seen in Isaiah 2:2, Jeremiah 3:17,

---

23 McGavran, Understanding Church Growth, 163.
24 McGavran, Understanding Church Growth, 177.
and Revelation 7:9, includes all the peoples of the world. The church instituted at Pentecost is a sacramental foretaste of the end time. Dominican Jean-Marie Roger Tillard argues in *Church of Churches: The Ecclesiology of Communion*:

> The event of Pentecost dominates and conditions the vision of the Church which gradually becomes imbedded in the Christian consciousness. We do not think it is an exaggeration to assert that the coming of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles “about the fiftieth day” appears in that case, if not as the origin of the Church . . . at least the manifestation (epiphaneia) of its nature.  

The gospel, therefore, although not solely resident in the makeup of any congregation, cannot be reified from it either.

If the gospel is rooted in the physical and spiritual being of the church, it is also found in the church’s actions. “Brotherhood” cannot be secondary to conversion. Jesus summarized the law saying, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matt. 22:37–39). The apostle Paul wrote, “And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor. 13:13). Catholic theologian Gerard Loughlin, in his discussion of church doctrine, stated, “Doctrine is always secondary to that which it informs—the church’s performance of the gospel—which is alone its basis or foundation.”  

Performance of the gospel takes many forms. Evangelism is one, but loving one’s neighbor is another. It can be argued that evangelism is an expression of love of neighbor and therefore derivative, rather than vice versa. Although the homogeneous unit principle can be countered solely on the essential nature and actions of the church, the main rationale, according to McGavran, is the homogeneous unit’s effectiveness for propagating the gospel.

McGavran derived the homogenous unit principle from his experience in the mission fields of India during the 1930s, relatively early in the twentieth century. His conclusions fail to accord with the

---


experience of the Pentecostal movement, which by the first decade of the twenty-first century, only a hundred years after its birth, had 523 million adherents, two-thirds of whom were outside the West where it originated, with 9 million converts annually. In an essay written at the beginning of the twenty-first century, sociologist José Casanova observes that Pentecostalism is “the most dynamic and fastest growing sector of Protestant Christianity worldwide and is likely to become the predominant global form of Christianity of the 21st century.”

Pentecostalism penetrates all socio-economic strata. Evangelism is a hallmark of the movement, as is its radical egalitarianism. African-Americans, Latinos, and whites participated in the Azusa Street revival of 1906–1909 that birthed Pentecostalism. This egalitarianism, according to anthropologist Joel Robbins, has aided rather than hindered its evangelistic efforts.

The egalitarianism of Pentecostal doctrine also supports evangelistic efforts as it aids evangelists in attracting a following. Led by an African American preacher and attended by many whites, Asians, and Latinos, the Azusa Street mission was, at its outset, strikingly integrated, and on the assumption that all are equal when used by the Spirit.

Despite prejudice that spawned racially exclusive Pentecostal denominations, diverse congregations are readily found in the United States. The fourteen hundred members of King’s Park International Church in Durham, North Carolina, for example, are racially mixed: 40 percent African American, 40 percent white, and 20 percent Asian, Latino, and other ethnicities. Given the striking success of the Pentecostal movement, in part because of its heterogeneous racial and ethnic character, the assertion that the homogeneous unit principle is necessary missiologically must be rejected. If anything, a diverse congregation appears to be an asset in attracting converts. This point raises important questions for the ecclesiology and missiology of Anglican,

Protestant, Catholic, and Orthodox traditions. The experience of the Pentecostal movement argues for a theological reconsideration of the bases of congregational diversity.

A Pneumatological Theology of Diversity

Any theology of diversity must be rooted in the triune nature of God. God as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is the essence of diversity and unity. This statement is obvious but often left unsaid in the theological literature of diversity. God as the creator is the source of diversity and unity within the world. The Roman Catholic Catechism states, “God himself created the visible world in all its richness, diversity, and order.”

The church as the people of God finds diversity and unity in the whole being of God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—three persons and one being. According to Jürgen Moltmann, “The church will be united neither solely through the monarchy of the Father, nor solely through the brotherhood of the Son, nor solely through the power of the Spirit, but only through the trinitarian unity of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.” The Triune God is the exemplar for and the source of the church’s life.

Through its relationship with the Triune God, the true nature of the church is unity and diversity. Komonchak maintains that catholicity, one of the four marks of the church, is “diversity integrated into unity.” Moltmann similarly has stated, “According to Paul’s teaching about the charismata, the rule for the community of Christ’s people has to be unity only in diversity, not unity in uniformity. It is only the diversity that make a living and viable unity possible.”

The failure of humanity to live in diversity and unity is the result not of divine imperative but of human and angelic choice. Scripture traces this to human disobedience of the divine command in Eden at the behest of the serpent, or Satan the fallen angel, according to Christian tradition. The etiology of fractured and fractious human

---

32 Moltmann, Sun of Righteousness, 26.
33 Catechism of the Catholic Church, para. 813 and 814.
34 Komonchak, “The Theology of the Local Church,” 35.
society is represented in Genesis 11:9, “Therefore it was called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.”

All three persons of the Trinity work to reconcile humanity. The Catholic Catechism affirms, “The ultimate end of the whole divine economy is the entry of God’s creatures into the perfect unity of the Blessed Trinity”; this work is done by each person of the Trinity, “according to his own personal property.”36 The Father sends the Son, who reconciles through the atoning work of the cross. The Holy Spirit manifests and mediates Christ’s reconciling work by uniting the disparate persons of the world into the body of Christ. In other words, Christ gathers and the Spirit unifies the messianic community.37 The Spirit always unifies in the love of the Father with the grace of the Son (2 Cor. 13:13). The Holy Spirit’s unifying work appears most clearly on the feast of Pentecost in the Book of Acts when, in a reversal of Babel, people from different nations understand the Galileans in their own languages. Tillard states, “On the feast of Pentecost the diversity of languages, symbol of the barrier which has grown up among peoples, is unified in the common understanding of the apostolic Word. Such is the work of the Spirit of the ‘last days.’”38

The Spirit began work long before Pentecost. At the beginning of his ministry, Jesus, “filled with the power of the Spirit,” brings “good news to the poor,” for he has been sent “to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free” (Luke 4:14–18). The Spirit comes upon Mary, who conceives the Christ child and who proclaims, “He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the powerful from their thrones, and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things, and sent the rich away empty” (Luke 1:51–53). The Spirit’s work in and through Christ is prefigured in the suffering servant in Isaiah: “Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations” (Isaiah 42:1). This brief survey reveals that an essential work of God, revealed and accomplished through the Spirit, is to remove barriers and inequities.

36 Catechism of the Catholic Church, para. 260 and 258.
38 Tillard, Church of Churches, 8.
The unifying office of the Holy Spirit arises out of the Spirit’s essence. The Holy Spirit is communion, *koinonia*, as Paul stated in his second letter to the Corinthians (13:13). Jürgen Moltmann has maintained, “If it is characteristic of the divine Spirit not merely to communicate this or that particular thing, but actually to enter into fellowship with believing men and women—if indeed he himself becomes their fellowship—then ‘fellowship’ cannot be merely a ‘gift’ of the Spirit. It must be the eternal essential nature of the Spirit himself.”

Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger similarly explained, “The Spirit’s own paradoxical and unique property is being *communio*.” According to Evangelical theologian Clark Pinnock, “The Spirit is the uniting love of the trinity, the power of community in diversity. Ultimately there exists the Father who is the divine ‘I’; the Son who is the divine ‘Thou’; and the Spirit who is the divine ‘We’.” The agreement of this wide range of theological viewpoints—liberal and conservative, Catholic and Protestant—confirms the Holy Spirit’s essential communality. This *communio* does not come at the expense of diversity.

Variety typifies the Spirit’s communion. Methodist theologian Thomas Oden has argued, “Drab uniformity is not the characteristic style of the Spirit, but rather variability, imaginative responsiveness, and exquisite diversity.” This diversity can be seen in the variety of the gifts of the Spirit. “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit” (1 Cor. 12:4). The diversity of the Spirit is further revealed in the diversity of persons in the Spirit. “For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many” (1 Cor. 12:13–14). Diversity characterizes the Spirit in part, because the Spirit embraces the multiplicity of creation. The second Constantinopolitan Council stated that all things are in the Holy Spirit.

As the person who encompasses all things, the Spirit, who is communion, continually seeks to bring the warring world together again.

---

The Holy Spirit unifies diverse gifts and persons through the Spirit’s simple essence of being. The Spirit, while present in various persons and places, remains one. In the words of Cyril of Alexandria:

> With reference, then, to the unity that is by the Spirit, we say once more, that we all, receiving one and the same Spirit, I mean the Holy Spirit, are in some sort blended together with one another and with God. For if, we being many, Christ, Who is the Spirit of the Father and His own Spirit, dwells in each one of us severally, still is the Spirit one and indivisible, binding together the dissevered spirits of the individualities of one and all of us, as we have a separate being, in His own natural singleness into unity, causing us all to be shown forth in Him, through Himself, and as one.44

While the simple presence of the Holy Spirit in the hearts and minds of the followers of Christ unifies them, the Spirit also unites through the gift of love which is the Spirit (Acts 8:20).45

The Spirit arouses the spirit of love in human hearts for other persons and for God. This loving spirit comes from the gift of the Holy Spirit, as Paul affirmed, “God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us” (Rom. 5:5). Augustine likewise believed that “God the Holy Spirit, who proceedeth from the Father, when he has been given to man, inflames him to the love of God and of his neighbor, and is himself love.”46

The fruit of the gift of love is found in the restoration of harmony between persons. The Outline of the Faith in the 1979 *Book of Common Prayer* states, “We recognize the presence of the Holy Spirit when we confess Jesus Christ as Lord and are brought into love and harmony with God, with ourselves, with our neighbors, and with all creation.”47

**Ecclesiological Diversity in the Spirit**

While the unifying Spirit works in persons individually, the Spirit also works corporately through Christ’s body, the church, which is the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3:16). As the Episcopal Outline

---

45 See Augustine, *De Trinitate*, XV.18.32.
46 Augustine, *De Trinitate*, XV.17.31.
of the Faith maintains, “The mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ.” 48 Moltmann similarly argued, “As a unifying force, the church is the messianic people of Christ, for unity is not merely an attribute of the church; it is the church’s task in the world as well.” 49

This reconciling vision of the church is scripturally grounded in Pentecost and the Eschaton. “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” (Rev. 7:9). The church is called to embrace all persons because its beginning and end include peoples from all the nations. The assembly of the faithful must embrace persons of all races and ethnicities not only to realize its true nature, but to proclaim God’s vision for a reconciled humanity. Lutheran theologian Walter R. Bouman has contended:

Under the dynamic of the Holy Spirit the church is called to anticipate the reign of God by its openness to the full variety of human being. The Spirit-given oneness of the church is to be a sign of the eventual oneness of all humanity. The church as the anticipation of the reign of God includes persons of every race, nation, ethnic group, of every time in human history, of every age group and intellectual ability, of every economic and social class. 50

The eucharistic assembly, the foretaste of the heavenly banquet, although duly constituted in word and sacrament, fails to be the temple of the Holy Spirit and to proclaim the divine eschatological vision without the diversity of human existence as found in any given locale.

Churches might reply that the quest for diversity and unity at the level of the eucharistic assembly is too narrow, because the eucharistic assembly is not the whole church. The fullness of diversity exists only within the church as a whole, or in ecumenical terms, in the communion of communions. Such a move fails to recognize that the church was born universally and particularly at Pentecost. As Joseph A. Komonchak has observed:

---

Historically, the paradigmatic case of Pentecost makes it clear that the church was born both local and universal. The assembly gathered in Jerusalem and yet it included representatives of all the nations, all of whom heard the one message in various languages. It was in this Jerusalem assembly that the universal church was already realized, and it was as a development and realization of this original catholicity that other particular and local churches were founded.51

The universality and particularity of the church cannot be realized at the parochial level, it might still be argued, because the local congregation lacks an essential order of ministry: the episcopate.

While rejecting as an error the idea that the whole mystery of the church could be found in the eucharistic assembly, Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger nevertheless stated in a May 28, 1992 letter to the Catholic bishops, “On Some Aspects of the Church Understood as Communion,” approved for publication by Pope John Paul II, that some elements constitutive of the church catholic, such as the papaey and the Council of Bishops, could not be derived from the particularity of the local church defined as the diocese.

The Primacy of the Bishop of Rome and the episcopal College are proper elements of the universal Church that are “not derived from the particularity of the Churches,” but are nevertheless interior to each particular Church. Consequently “we must see the ministry of the Successor of Peter, not only as a ‘global’ service, reaching each particular Church from ‘outside’, as it were, but as belonging already to the essence of each particular Church from ‘within.’” . . . The ministry of the Successor of Peter as something interior to each particular Church is a necessary expression of that fundamental mutual interiority between universal Church and particular Church.52

Accordingly, not all elements constitutive of the church must be present to be the church. The full order of ministry, that is, the episcopate, is in this sense interior to the parish church, since the bishop is resident in the cathedral rather than the parish.

51 Komonchak, “The Theology of the Local Church,” 43.
It might be said similarly that there is an interiority of diversity imputed at the parochial level due to the catholicity—diversity in unity—of the whole church. This point is reasonable since no congregation can embody the full diversity of humanity or the kingdom of God. Nonetheless, to return to the example of the episcopate, as stated in *Lumen Gentium*, a bishop is necessary for a local congregation: “Individual bishops are the visible principle and foundation of unity in their particular churches.” Each diocese, defined as a geographical area, requires a bishop. Each parish, also defined as a geographical area, even if tenuously since the dawn of the automotive era, analogously needs to approximate the diversity of a particular area to proclaim the eschatological unity of the kingdom of God. Komonchak pointedly enjoins his own denomination to realize that “integration has to take place at every level of church existence”:

in small communities, in parishes, in dioceses, in regional and national groups of churches, in the one Catholic communion. At every level catholicity means fullness-in-unity. For that reason, catholicity is not an attribute external to local communities of faith, found only when they assemble in a universal community. It must characterize every assembly of Christians, of which it must be true that there is no Jew and Greek, no male and female, no slave and freeman, but all are one Christ. A community in which such integration of all is not accomplished falls short of being a realization of the one and Catholic Church. Catholicity, in that sense, is a constant challenge for every assembly of believers beginning with our own.

Given the exigencies of the parish, diversity in any congregation will be only an approximation of the diversity found in any given area. In the eschatological assembly alone will the church find its full unity in diversity.

**Ecclesial Diversity through the Eschaton**

Since the church in its full diversity and inclusivity can be realized only at the end of time, the eschatological assembly of peoples from all nations draws the church ever onward. The World Council of Churches’ 1961 “New Delhi Statement on Unity” maintained:

The love of the Father and the Son in the unity of the Holy Spirit is the source and goal of the unity which the Triune God wills for all men and creation. . . . The reality of this unity was manifest at Pentecost in the gift of the Holy Spirit, through whom we know in this present age the first fruits of that perfect union of the Son with his Father, which will be known in its fullness only when all things are consummated by Christ in his glory.55

The church, therefore, is as much “becoming” as it “is.” Catholic theologian Carl F. Starkloff has argued, “Church is not only a model of communion, but a model for a richer historical development of that communion.”56 Methodist theologian Geoffrey Wainwright similarly has contended for a developmental view of the church, noting that “the Holy Spirit works from the very beginning to constitute and compose the church and its members, coming to them and abiding in them corporately and individually, starting to transform them in the direction of God’s kingdom and enabling them to bear witness to the gospel for the sake of its extension.”57 While fully accepting that there are institutional aspects of the church, the church cannot be a static institution if it is to proclaim the eschatological vision of God. Instead of an institution that welcomes the other, the church must be understood as a living body, animated by the Holy Spirit, yearning for its fulfillment in the Eschaton. Presbyterian theologian Daniel L. Migliore warns, “When the work of the Spirit is forgotten or suppressed, the power of God is apt to be understood as distant, hierarchical, and coercive; Christocentric faith deteriorates into Christomonism; . . . the church is seen as a rigid power structure in which members rule over others.”58 Clark Pinnock would agree:

The Spirit who empowers the developing creation, who (by grace) is with every person, and who anoints Jesus as the wisdom of God is poured out on the community of the disciples. Here too we have got the balance wrong. We have given priority to the Word

and neglected the Spirit (not completely, of course). We need a life-giving ecclesiology. We need to invoke the Spirit, the animation of her life, in unrestricted openness to the gifts and to being built up into a habitation of God by the Spirit, becoming a community which experiences the continuation of the anointing of Jesus. 59

This is a communion where God is not a distant figure but a joyous reality.

At its worst, the christomonistic institutional church, devoid of the animating, liberating power of the Holy Spirit, sees those who are racially or ethnically “other” with fear and violence, seeking to extirpate or denigrate them. At its best, this sort of institutional church sees the other only as outsider, creating a subject–object, I–It, relationship, deigning on what grounds to welcome the other, with the tacit understanding that the other must become like it to become a part of it. The church animated by the Spirit, on the other hand, bursts the bonds of institutionalism that keep it from finding its true being in the alterity of God and people of different skin colors and cultural backgrounds. As Clark Pinnock has maintained, “God’s Spirit is the personal Other who draws us higher up and deeper into the house of love.” 60 The church needs the liberating Spirit to level the societal walls that hem its witness.

The church, from its earliest days, has too often succumbed to the lure of societal power that has rendered its prophetic, inclusive, and eschatological message an exclusive spiritual representation of prejudicial social norms. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “For when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk. What! Do you not have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you show contempt for the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing?” (1 Cor. 11:21–22). Paul’s critique still applies to the church today, as Starkloff has described it:

On the level of social analysis, the Protestant churches have recapitulated the problematic alliances of the parent Roman Catholic Church by forming alliances with the state, however much their methods may have differed. When this alliance occurs, letting

slide the distinct intentionality as a prophetic community, it is a simple matter to succumb to the comforts of belonging to a cultural system.61

The comforts and pressures of belonging to a cultural system can be seen in the Pentecostal experience in the United States. Segregationist pressures, in no small part from other churches, crushed the multiracial experience of Azusa Street in 1909 and forced the birth of whites-only Pentecostal churches such as the Assemblies of God and African American-only ones such as the Pentecostal Assemblies of the World.62 In rejecting the blandishments of privilege for life in the Spirit, the church must embrace persons of all races and ethnicities in the eucharistic feast.

In the unparalleled diversity and unity of the eucharist, the church finds its true nature, because it finds what is at the heart of the universe—the divine indwelling relationship of the Trinity. Martin Buber maintained that the primal essence of human existence is relational. “In the beginning is the relation—as the category of being, as readiness, as a form that reaches out to be filled, as a model of the soul; the a priori relation; the innate You.”63 In the other, who is not other, but “You,” to use Buber’s language, the church through the unifying power of the Holy Spirit realizes true diversity and unity of being that is the essence of the Trinity.

Conclusion

In the wake of 9/11, Rabbi Jonathan Sacks wrote in The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations, “Great responsibility now lies with the world’s religious communities. Against all expectations they have emerged in the twenty-first century as key forces in a global age.”64 The challenge and hope of the current time can only be fulfilled in the divine call of God for all humanity. This promise will be squandered if members of local congregations continue to segregate themselves from people of different races and ethnicities. Yang and Smith wrote, “As long as blacks and whites do not attend

---

61 Starkloff, “The Church as Covenant, Culture, and Communion,” 422.
church with each other, then the injuries and separation of the past are not only in the past, but they are alive and well among us.\textsuperscript{65} The church needs to appropriate the unifying power of the Holy Spirit to realize the diversity that is its true nature, its eschatological calling, and the hope of the world.

\textsuperscript{65} Yang and Smith, “Trends in Black-White Church Integration,” 19.