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Neo-Calvinism and Ethnic Churches in Multiethnic Contexts

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Abstract

Despite neo-Calvinism's thorny historic relationship with apartheid, this article retrieves from neo-Calvinism to contribute to the contemporary evangelical conversation about ethnic and multiethnic churches. Scholars of various disciplines have commonly accepted a link between neo-Calvinism and South Africa's apartheid. Meanwhile, neo-Calvinists labor to sever this link, wishing to disentangle their tradition from apartheid's evils, such as the enforcement of racially segregated churches. In reaction to the evils of such segregation, many contemporary Evangelicals have advocated for multiethnic churches that demographically reflect their ethnically diverse communities on the basis of Christian unity. This has implicitly and explicitly challenged the legitimacy of ethnic churches. This article contends that despite the link between neo-Calvinism and apartheid, and despite neo-Calvinist efforts to sever this link, neo-Calvinism offers good biblical and theological support for the establishment of ethnic churches in multiethnic contexts without at all denigrating multiethnic churches or falling into the evils of apartheid.

Keywords

1   Introduction

As metropolitan centers around the world have been growing more and more ethnically diverse, discussions surrounding the local church and ethnicity have arisen. What are the bases for ethnic and multiethnic churches? Are ethnic churches in multiethnic contexts faithful and consistent with Christian unity and the gospel, or are they just sociologically pragmatic? Are multiethnic churches, then, inherently superior and more biblical? How does the establishment of ethnic churches differ from the segregation of churches during Jim Crow and apartheid? Is there really any reason for the establishment of ethnic churches within multiethnic communities?

This article, while repudiating the evils of apartheid, seeks to defend the legitimacy of ethnic churches within multiethnic communities by retrieving theological concepts and emphases from the neo-Calvinist tradition. Such an argument may seem odd on two fronts. First, such an argument may appear to mimic the supporters of apartheid and all its attendant evils in South Africa, for the Dutch Reformed Church made doctrinal arguments from their neo-Calvinist convictions to promote the enforcement of racially segregated churches. Second, such an argument would simultaneously seem to run counter to those neo-Calvinists who oppose the link between neo-Calvinism and apartheid. Recognizing the wickedness of apartheid, they argue that neo-Calvinism was misappropriated, inconsistently applied, and hijacked for evil purposes. They contend that apartheid's racial segregation of churches was untrue to the original intentions of Kuyper and Bavinck, who both stressed the unity of Christ's church. At first glance, therefore, my argument would seem to place me in league with the apartheid supporters on one hand, and on the other hand place me in opposition with the contemporary neo-Calvinists who are unconvinced of any significant link between neo-Calvinism and apartheid.

My contention, however, is that despite the link that truly exists between neo-Calvinism and apartheid, and also despite recent neo-Calvinist efforts to sever this link, neo-Calvinism offers good biblical and theological support for the establishment of ethnic churches in multiethnic contexts, while simultaneously resisting the evils of apartheid and supporting the establishment of multiethnic churches as well. To establish my argument, I will first discuss the complex relationships between neo-Calvinism and apartheid to demonstrate that while a link truly did exist between them in history, the link between neo-Calvinism and apartheid stems from an inconsistent and imbalanced appropriation of neo-Calvinism for the sake of evil ends. A more consistent and balanced appropriation of neo-Calvinism, however, can and should be retrieved for contemporary evangelical discussions concerning ethnic churches. I will

then lay out the contemporary evangelical discourse concerning ethnic and multiethnic churches in our present post-civil rights era, explaining some of the reasons why ethnic churches have come to be viewed as contrary to church unity. And finally, I will conclude with several arguments influenced by neo-Calvinism in biblical and theological support of ethnic churches in multiethnic contexts, while neither opposing multiethnic churches nor promoting apartheid's evils.

2 Questions and Parameters

The question under consideration in this article is: *Within multiethnic societies, such as those within South Africa and the United States, are ethnic churches inherently inconsistent with Christian unity and thus inferior, illegitimate, and unbiblical?* Utilizing principles developed by thinkers within the neo-Calvinist tradition, I will answer this question in the negative.

I am purposely engaging the discussion in terms of ethnicity as opposed to race. The concept of race as a term signifying "a biological concept referring to the taxonomic (classificatory) unit immediately below the species,"[1] has been largely deconstructed across multiple disciplines.[2] Ethnicity, however, can be more clearly and defensibly defined:

> An ethnic group is defined here as a collectivity within a larger society having real or putative common ancestry, memories of a shared historical past, and a cultural focus on one or more symbolic elements defined as the epitome of their peoplehood[, such as] kinship patterns, physical contiguity, religious affiliation, language or dialect forms, tribal affiliation, nationality, phenotypical features, or any combination of these. A necessary accompaniment is some consciousness of kind among members of the group.[3]

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1   David Barrett, ed., *World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comparative Study of Churches and Religions in the Modern World AD 1900–2000* (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1982), 107.

2   Elizabeth Y. Sung, "'Racial Realism' in Biblical Interpretation and Theological Anthropology: A Systematic-Theological Evaluation of Recent Accounts," *Ex Auditu: An International Journal of Theological Interpretation of Scripture* 31 (2015): 5.

3   Elizabeth Y. Sung, "'Race' and Ethnicity Discourse and the Christian Doctrine of Humanity: A Systematic Sociological and Theological Appraisal" (PhD diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2014). See also Richard A. Schermerhorn, *Comparative Ethnic Relations: A Framework for Theory and Research* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

In short, while race has more to do with biology and physicality, ethnicity is more focused on culture and heritage. My operating definition of an 'ethnic church' is any local congregation that indicates—whether by name, vision, or mission statement—an emphasis on ministering to a particular ethnic group. I am not asking whether ethnic churches are superior to other churches or whether they should be the norm. I am merely asking whether ethnic churches in ethnically diverse contexts are inferior and whether multiethnic or non-ethnic-specific churches should be the norm in such contexts. Richard Hardison helpfully asks the pertinent question of whether churches within multiethnic contexts have a 'multiethnic mandate' or merely an option to be multiethnic.[4] Additionally, I am limiting the scope of the question and asking whether there is a multiethnic mandate or an option to be multiethnic among those *who speak the same language*. For even Kuyper, who, when formulating rules for church planting in the Dutch East Indies, stated that different races and nations should live together in one church, he still made the exception in the case of different languages.[5] Lastly, I am largely considering this question with the pluralistic American metropolitan context in mind, and as a contribution to the relevant evangelical discourse on the topic, which will be surveyed and discussed later in this article.[6]

3   Neo-Calvinism and Apartheid

Offering what is perhaps the most current voice to date concerning neo-Calvinism's relationship with apartheid, Brian Stanley writes: "Contrary to popular belief, the Dutch Reformed churches were not the originators of seg-

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4   Richard Hardison, "A Theological Critique of the Multiethnic Church Movement: 2000–2013" (PhD diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014), 4.

5   See J.C. Adonis, *Die afgebreekte skeidsmuur weer opgebou: Die verstrengeling van die sendingsbeleid van die Nederduits Gereformeerde Kerk in Suid-Afrika met die praktyk en ideologie van apartheid in historiese perspektief* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1982), 59, and George Harinck, "Abraham Kuyper, South Africa, and Apartheid," *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 23, no. 2 (2002): 184–187.

6   The term 'evangelical' is used in this article to describe the neo-Evangelicalism of the mid-twentieth century and beyond, which sought to distinguish itself from the Christian separatism and fundamentalism of the 1920s and 1930s by being less rigid on theological nonessentials and more culturally relevant. This sentiment was given institutional expression in the evangelical establishment of Fuller Theological Seminary (1947), Christianity Today (1956), and the Lausanne Movement (1974). See George Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987).

regationist policy in South Africa earlier in the [twentieth] century. Rather
that unhappy distinction belongs to English-speaking paternalist moderates."[7]
However, he continues:

> Over the next few years various mission thinkers in the Dutch Reformed
> churches articulated a more absolute and highly theorized doctrine of
> separate development ... In the 1940s these ideas assumed a more explic-
> itly neo-Calvinist character, deriving in part from the ideas of the Dutch
> statesman and Calvinist theologian Abraham Kuyper (1837–1920).
> Pseudo-scientific or Germanic notions of race played little or no part in
> Kuyper's ideas. Nevertheless, the principle that God in his sovereignty
> had separated nations into their allotted spheres within which their dis-
> tinctive cultures could flourish became one of the ideological founda-
> tions of the policy of "apartheid" implemented by the National Party after
> 1948.[8]

With nuance, Stanley neither supports the myth about segregation in South
Africa originating in the Dutch Reformed Church, nor fails to implicate this
church in its doctrinal support of apartheid. Furthermore, he specifically
names Abraham Kuyper and neo-Calvinism as sources from which doctrinal
support for apartheid was drawn, though only "in part." This where the difficulty
lies. What "part" did neo-Calvinism have to play, and how are we to understand
it?

It is not difficult to see how Kuyper's neo-Calvinism—with its notions of pre-
destination, chosen covenant people, the God-ordained diversity of creation,
sphere sovereignty, and the pillarization of pluralistic societies—could easily
be appropriated in ideological support of modern Afrikaner nationalism and
apartheid policy. Predestination and the concept of a chosen covenant people
have frequently been cited to connect Afrikaner nationalism with Calvinism
(similar to the previously widely accepted Perry Miller argument concern-
ing the Puritans and Manifest Destiny in America).[9] Additionally, the God-
ordained diversity of peoples in Kuyper's thought and in his interpretation of

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7   Brian Stanley, *Christianity in the Twentieth Century: A World History* (Princeton: Princeton Uni-
     versity Press, 2018), 247.
8   Stanley, *Christianity in the Twentieth Century*, 248.
9   For a detailed bibliography of sources that assert, assume, and elaborate upon the Calvinist
     paradigm of Afrikaner history, see the "Bibliographical Comment" in Andre du Toit, "Puritans
     in Africa? Afrikaner 'Calvinism' and Kuyperian Neo-Calvinism in Late Nineteenth-Century
     South Africa," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 27, no. 2 (April 1985): 239–240.

Genesis 10 and 11 were clearly appropriated by the Dutch Reformed churches in support of segregated churches. In 1974 the Synod of the Dutch Reformed church wrote:

> to arrive at the whole truth in connection with the family of nations, Gen 10 and 11 must be read in conjunction. The progressive differentiation of humanity into peoples and races involved not only a curse, but also a blessing, not only judgment on the sinful arrogance of the tower builders of Babel, but also an act of mercy whereby mankind is not only protected from destruction, but God's purpose with the creation of man is achieved.[10]

One could also see how Kuyper's sphere sovereignty and advocacy for the pillarization of society could support the Afrikaner desire for a pluralistic society in which the individuality of each people group was to be respected and protected:

> Our mission policy must differentiate between race and race. God instituted boundary lines between the races which we cannot eradicate in our blind zeal. Calvinism teaches that God has given a special mission to each people ... Evangelization may not destroy a people's individuality ... For reasons of principle, grounded in the Calvinism of our people, it is necessary therefore that in the mission field there be segregation of black and white.[11]

And in addition to these theological concepts, which could easily be appropriated for unintended causes, it certainly did not help that Kuyper, being a man of his time, spoke and wrote words that would be considered as terribly racist and offensive to contemporary sensibilities:

> Is it now not understandable that the workman of the Aryan race compares favorably against the dark shadow that continues to rest on the negro population? ... As for the majority, though, the negro population lacks skill and pride and character, and it is not least through the con-

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10   1974 Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church, "Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture" (Cape Town: National Book Printers Ltd, 1976), 18.

11   Die Federasie van die Calvinistiese Studenteverenigings in Suid-Afrika, "Calvinism and Evangelization," in *Koers in die Krisis*, vol. 1, ed. H.G. Stoker and F.J.M. Potgieter (Stellenbosch: Pro Ecclesia, 1935), 127.

trast with this abhorrent self-degradation that the white workman, out of *self-respect*, is prompted to act more nobly and to occupy a better social position.[12]

Despite Kuyper's disturbing words, and the handful of theological links between neo-Calvinism and apartheid, others, particularly neo-Calvinists, have been quick to push back, setting Kuyper's speech in context and challenging the connections between neo-Calvinism and apartheid. James Eglinton, for example, does identify genuinely racist elements in Kuyper's language, such as his generalizations about the 'black' and 'white' groups, which perpetuated "crude, negative stereotypes about African Americans."[13] However, he also challenges readers of Kuyper to recognize Kuyper's assertion of white guilt in America and his criticisms of slavery and its effects. On the topic of predestination's link to apartheid and nationalism, Andre du Toit argues that linking apartheid to a robust Calvinism, as opposed to merely linking it to an unthoughtful and generalized idea of providence that could also be found outside of Calvinism, is a tenuous and problematic assumption. For the connection between a robust and systematic Calvinism and Afrikaner nationalism is problematized when one considers that there was quite an "absence of a true historically and theologically entrenched Calvinism, comparable to the Puritan and Dutch Calvinist traditions."[14]

George Harinck admits the paternalistic character of Dutch colonization under Kuyper, yet unties the significant connections made between Kuyper and the Boers in South Africa. He also reminds us that Kuyper was in favor of one united church in which the different races and nations ought to worship together.[15] Furthermore, Harinck argues that race did not play a dominant role in the minds and works of neo-Calvinists, but that Kuyper's doctrines of common grace and human pluriformity were poorly appropriated in defense of apartheid by South African students who studied at the Free University of Amsterdam. Harinck is quick to point to the Bavinckian strand of neo-Calvinism, represented by B.B. Keet, J.J. Buskes, and J.H. Bavinck, who also came out of the

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12   Abraham Kuyper, transl. James Eglinton, *Varia Americana* (Amsterdam: Höveker and Wormser, 1898), 11–12.

13   James Eglinton, "*Varia Americana* and Race," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 11, nos. 1–2 (2017): 78–79.

14   Andre du Toit, "Puritans in Africa? Afrikaner 'Calvinism' and Kuyperian Neo-Calvinism in Late Nineteenth-Century South Africa," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 27, no. 2 (April 1985): 209–240.

15   George Harinck, "Abraham Kuyper, South Africa, and Apartheid," *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* 23, no. 2 (2002): 184–187.

Free University and yet strongly critiqued and opposed apartheid on the basis of humanity's unity.[16]

Botman also reminds us that one of the fiercest anti-apartheid activists, Allan Boesak, of the Coloured branch of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa, cited Kuyper in his fight against the social injustice of apartheid.[17] In the case of sphere sovereignty's relationship with apartheid, Rathbone clarifies that sphere sovereignty was hijacked by the reduction of all reality to race, when sphere sovereignty was actually meant to highlight "the sovereignty of divine ordinances in each sphere of life that functions independently but is irreducibly related to all other aspects through the universal authority of God."[18] And Baskwell points to apartheid's enforcement of segregation in South Africa, which differed from Kuyper's notion of the pillarization of society in that for Kuyper, the segmenting of society and the choice to participate in a particular society was voluntary.[19]

In the final analysis, one cannot deny that theological concepts from within the neo-Calvinist tradition were indeed used to support apartheid. And yet, neither can one deny that some neo-Calvinist concepts were misappropriated, inconsistently applied, and others ignored, leading to severe and harmfully imbalanced policies in South Africa that would seem to contradict the 'deep logic'[20] of neo-Calvinism, particularly Kuyper's and Bavinck's commitments to the unity of humankind and of the church. Therefore, it should not be considered as out of the question whether neo-Calvinism has much to offer contemporary evangelical discussions concerning ethnic and multiethnic churches. Though one particular policy that existed during apartheid in South Africa was the enforced racial segregation of churches,[21] such segregation differs sig-

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16   George Harinck, "Wipe Out Lines of Division (Not Distinctions): Bennie Keet, Neo-Calvinism and the Struggle against Apartheid," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 11, nos. 1–2 (2017): 81–98.

17   Allan Boesak, *Black and Reformed: Apartheid, Liberation, and the Calvinist Tradition* (New York: Orbis Books, 1984), 91; H. Russel Botman, "Is Blood Thicker than Justice? The Legacy of Abraham Kuyper for Southern Africa," in Luis Lugo, *Religion, Pluralism, and Public Life: Abraham Kuyper's Legacy for the Twenty-First Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 343–344.

18   Mark Rathbone, "Sphere Sovereignty and Irreducibility: The Ambiguous Use of Abraham Kuyper's Ideas during the Time of Apartheid in South Africa," *KOERS—Bulletin for Christian Scholarship* 80, no. 1, Art. #2208 (September 2015): 2.

19   Patrick Baskwell, "Kuyper and Apartheid: A Revisiting" *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 62, no. 4 (2006): 1269–1290.

20   Eglinton, "*Varia Americana* and Race," 79–80.

21   Susan Rennie Ritner, "The Dutch Reformed Church and Apartheid," *Journal of Contemporary History* 2, no. 4 (October 1967): 18–25.

nificantly from the majority of ethnic churches within multiethnic contexts and should not be cited by Evangelicals to condemn most ethnic churches today.

4   Evangelicalism and Ethnic Churches in a Post-civil Rights Era

"Your church is not biblical." This is what some Boston College students said to Daniel Eng, a Chinese American Christian who attended not only their predominantly white evangelical campus fellowship, but also Boston Evangelical Chinese Church.[22] In the minds of Daniel's peers, ethnic churches were contrary to the unifying principle of the gospel. This occurrence is not a unique incident containing a marginal sentiment. In our post-civil rights era, American Evangelicals have increasingly sought to promote multiethnic churches, often criticizing ethnic churches in the process.

The most prominent arguments against ethnic churches in multiethnic contexts have arisen out of engagement with the Homogeneous Unit Principle. The impetus for the Homogeneous Unit Principle reaches back to 1955, when Fuller missiologist Donald McGavran asked how peoples, tribes, clans, and castes become Christian.[23] Consequently, he observed that "[p]eople like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic, or class barriers."[24] This sparked the Church Growth Movement. Churches across America pursued growth by targeting specific demographics with a "seeker sensitive" approach that minimized social barriers.

Churches began to use the language of "targeting" certain homogeneous units of unbelievers. For example, in Rick Warren's *Purpose Driven Church* (1995) one finds a picture of "Saddleback Sam," the target of Warren's South Orange County, California suburban megachurch. According to this picture, "Saddleback Sam" is a comfortable, self-satisfied, white-collar, Caucasian male, complete with mobile phone, pager, watch, and loafers.[25] Ethnic churches

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22   Daniel K. Eng, "Your Church Is Not Biblical," *Asian American Pastor: Daniel K. Eng* (blog), June 20, 2008, https://aapastor.wordpress.com/2008/06/20/your-church-is-not-biblical -why-ethnic-specific-ministries-exist-in-america-part-2/ (accessed May 11, 2018).

23   Donald McGavran, *The Bridges of God* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2005), 1.

24   Donald McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth*, ed. C. Peter Wagner (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 163.

25   Rick Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Church: Growth without Compromising Your Message or Mission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 168–172.

in America resonated with this philosophy of ministry. In many ways, it validated their aim and existence.[26]

It was not long, however, before Evangelicals came to reflect critically upon the Church Growth Movement and McGavran's Homogeneous Unit Principle.[27] One major criticism leveled against the Church Growth Movement was that it opened the door to a numbers-focused pragmatism. Worse yet, the Homogeneous Unit Principle was criticized for being contrary to crosscultural reconciliation and the unity of diverse peoples in Christ.

Certain evangelical biblical scholars contested McGavran's insistence that the early New Testament churches mostly occurred in homogeneous units.[28] On theological and ethical grounds, others became increasingly sympathetic to the New Perspective on Paul, and argued that the social implications of the gospel ran contrary to McGavran's Homogeneous Unit Principle.[29] These factors, combined with the powerful cultural promotion of ethnic diversity, racial reconciliation, and multiculturalism from the Civil Rights Movement, engendered an evangelical vision for multiethnic churches in America. Churches were increasingly convicted by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous words in 1963: "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 Christ has no east or west, we stand at the most segregated hour in this nation. This is tragic."[30]

Yet, critiques of McGavran's Homogeneous Unit Principle and the subsequent promotion of multiethnic churches from the 1960s onward also unearthed implicit critiques of ethnic churches. When the renowned missiologist David Bosch warned against the danger of the Homogeneous Unit Principle, ethnic churches were clearly on his mind. Bosch, a member of the Dutch

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26   C. Peter Wagner, *Church Growth and the Whole Gospel: A Biblical Mandate* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1998), 179–181.

27   A Lausanne Movement committee issued a statement on the Homogeneous Unit Principle as early as 1977. See Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, "LOP 1—The Pasadena Consultation: Homogeneous Unit Principle," 1977, https://www.lausanne.org/content/lop/lop-1#8.

28   Frederick Norris, "Strategy for Mission in the New Testament," in *Exploring Church Growth*, ed. Wilbert Shenk (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 260–276.

29   John H. Yoder, "The Social Shape of the Gospel," in *Exploring Church Growth*, ed. Wilbert Shenk (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 277–284.

30   Martin Luther King, Jr., "1963 Public Interview at Western Michigan University," Western Michigan University Libraries, Archives and Regional History Collections, http://www.wmich.edu/sites/default/files/attachments/MLK.pdf (accessed July 8, 2018), cited in Russell W. Dalton, *Marvelous Myths: Marvel Superheroes and Everyday Faith* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2011), 92, 205.

Reformed Church in South Africa, originally welcomed apartheid as a young man in 1948, but eventually he came to condemn it.[31] He wrote: "Class prejudices and people's alienation from each other only become more deeply ingrained into the human heart where ethnicity is regarded as an intrinsic feature of the church."[32] René Padilla expressed a similar sentiment: "Unity in Christ is far more than a unity occasionally expressed at the level of 'the supra-congregational relationship of believers in the total Christian body'; it is the unity of the members of Christ's body, to be made visible in the common life of local congregations."[33]

In this vein, several publications (particularly from American Evangelicals) have asserted the multiethnic mandate upon local churches in multiethnic contexts, all in the name of unity and racial reconciliation. Some of these publications have come in the form of testimonials, such as Rodney Woo's *The Color of Church*, which not only lays out common scriptural arguments for the multiethnic mandate, but also tells the story of how Woo led a 98-percent Anglo Baptist congregation of two hundred people to become a 60-percent non-Anglo congregation of 550 in Texas.[34] Another example is Kathleen Garces-Foley's *Crossing the Ethnic Divide*, which tells the story of how Evergreen Baptist Church became a multiethnic church in Southern California and uses Evergeen's example to make a case for church growth via multiculturalism rather than homogeneity.[35]

Perhaps the most outspoken proponent of the multiethnic mandate is Mark DeYmaz. Beginning in 2007 with *Building a Healthy Multiethnic Church: Mandate, Commitments and Practices of a Diverse Congregation*, DeYmaz has authored multiple books discussing why multiethnic churches are mandated by scripture, how to transition from being monoethnic to multiethnic, and how to minister within such churches.[36] When DeYmaz reads scripture, he sees

31   J. Kevin Livingston, *A Missiology of the Road: Early Perspectives in David Bosch's Theology of Mission and Evangelism* (Cambridge: James Clarke and Co., 2014), 42–58.

32   David Bosch, "The Structure of Mission: An Exposition of Matthew 28:16–20," in *Exploring Church Growth*, ed. Wilbert Shenk (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 218–248.

33   C. René Padilla, "The Unity of the Church and the Homogeneous Unit Principle," in *Exploring Church Growth*, ed. Wilbert Shenk (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 295.

34   Rodney Woo, *The Color of Church: A Biblical and Practical Paradigm for Multiracial Churches* (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2009).

35   Kathleen Garces-Foley, *Crossing the Ethnic Divide: The Multiethnic Church on a Mission* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

36   Mark DeYmaz, *Building a Healthy Multiethnic Church: Mandate, Commitments and Practices of a Diverse Congregation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007); Mark DeYmaz and Harry Li, *Mixing Diversity into Your Local Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010); Mark DeYmaz and Harry Li, *Leading a Healthy Multiethnic Church: Seven Common Challenges and*

Christ envisioning a multiethnic church so that the world would know God's love in John 17. He reads Luke glowingly describing the church at Antioch, "the first mega, missional and multiethnic community of faith and the most influential church in the New Testament" in Acts 11 and 13. And he also believes that Paul "prescribes unity and diversity for the local church in his letter to the Ephesians" concerning church unity for the sake of the gospel.[37]

Those who agree with DeYmaz also discern this multiethnic mandate from a biblical theology of the church that culminates in John's vision of the innumerable multitude of redeemed peoples from every tribe, tongue, and nation worshiping the Lamb in one voice.[38] Anything other than the pursuit of multiethnic local churches in multiethnic contexts is considered as divisive, and all local churches in such contexts are therefore "obliged" to build diverse local churches because the gospel demands it.[39] For "the biblical mandate for diversity, coupled with the fact that diverse people are literally right on our doorsteps, makes it difficult to justify non-diverse churches."[40]

Of course, more moderate positions have been published, such as McIntosh and McMahan's *Being the Church in a Multiethnic Community: Why it Matters and How it Works*, which does not insist on a one-size-fits-all approach that must be taken by all local churches in multiethnic communities. Richard Hardison's dissertation also takes a stand against the multiethnic mandate and analyzes seven prominent arguments against ethnic churches within multiethnic contexts.[41] Among his many arguments against the multiethnic mandate, one argument that Hardison is particularly keen on pressing is that such a mandate is ironic because "its adherents often pursue multiethnicity out of love for minorities, yet the churches they strive to create end up being less loving than

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How to Overcome Them (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2013); Mark DeYmaz and Bob Whitesel, *re:MIX: Transitioning Your Church to Living Color* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2016); Mark DeYmaz and Oneya Fennell Okuwobi, *Multiethnic Conversations: An Eight-Week Journey toward Unity in Your Church* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2016).

37   Mark DeYmaz, "The Theology of Multiethnic Church," *Christianity Today* (June 2010), http://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2010/june-online-only/theology-of -multiethnic-church.html (accessed November 27, 2017).

38   Aubrey Sequeira, "Re-Thinking Homogeneity: The Bible Case for Multiethnic Churches," *9Marks Journal* (Summer 2015): 37–43.

39   Derwin Gray, *The High Definition Leader: Building Multiethnic Churches in a Multiethnic World* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2015), 48, 78.

40   Christina Cleveland, "Should Every Church Be Multiethnic?" *Christina Cleveland* (blog) (November 6, 2013), http://www.christenacleveland.com/blogarchive/2013/11/should -every-church-be-multiethnic (accessed November 27 2017).

41   Richard Hardison, "A Theological Critique of the Multiethnic Church Movement: 2000–2013" (PhD diss., Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014).

monoethnic churches because they ask minorities to conform to the majority (often subconsciously) in matters of non-essentials."[42] Hardison is adamant that "Scripture never explicitly calls all churches to be as ethnically diverse as their communities."[43]

Similar discussions have also taken place within evangelical organizations, such as InterVarsity Christian Fellowship (IVCF), with multiple views represented. IVCF staff person Eric Robinson, for example, wants both to "multiply millions of multiethnic churches around the world" *and* to "affirm the beautifully necessary role of ethnic specific churches within the global diversity of the body of Christ" because "both are needed," and "both are biblical."[44] In 2001, IVCF even collaborated on a paper entitled "Two Views Regarding Ethnic Specific and Multiethnic Fellowships," which wrestled with the same issues but in the context of parachurch campus ministries.[45] In the paper, Collin Tomikawa defended ethnic specific fellowships as a desirable goal, and Sandy Schaupp questioned whether such monoethnic gatherings were in line with God's intentions for believers. The paper brought them both to realize that a key difference that shaped each of their views was whether or not ethnic and cultural distinctions were intended by God as a pre-fall reality or a post-fall reality. Tomikawa affirmed the former and Schaupp affirmed the latter.

Nevertheless, the current prevailing position amongst the most influential Evangelicals is that "a church should reflect the community in which it resides."[46] This predominant position is clearly at odds with ethnic churches in multiethnic contexts. Hence, such churches have come to be viewed with varying degrees of suspicion and even contempt by many Evangelicals. The rest of this article will argue that such suspicion and contempt are unwarranted. Those who insist upon the multiethnic mandate have not only made their arguments without taking concrete and historical churches and contexts into account, but they have also made contestable assumptions about the Babel

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42   Hardison, "A Theological Critique of the Multiethnic Church Movement," 187.

43   Hardison, "A Theological Critique of the Multiethnic Church Movement," 152.

44   Eric Robinson, "Should All Churches Be Multiethnic?" *Minister Different* (blog), http://ministerdifferent.com/all-multiethnic/#footnote_2_260 (accessed November 27, 2017).

45   Collin Tomikawa and Sandy Schaupp, "Two Views Regarding Ethnic Specific and Multiethnic Fellowships," written for the National Asian American Staff Conference (March 2001), InterVarsity Christian Fellowship/USA, https://mem.intervarsity.org/resources/two-views-regarding-ethnic-specific-and-multiethnic-fellowships (accessed November 27, 2017).

46   Kevin Smith, "Are Multiethnic Churches the Only Way?" *The National Association of Evangelicals* (Spring/Summer 2016), https://www.nae.net/multiethnic-churches-way/ (accessed November 27, 2017).

narrative, the (redemptive) history of ethnic diversity, the relationship between local churches and the universal church, and what a biblical notion of unity is meant to look like across all ministry contexts.

5   In Defense of Ethnic Churches

In considering whether ethnic churches in multiethnic contexts are at odds with Christian unity and thus less legitimate than multiethnic churches, it is worth asking at least three relevant questions: 1) What is the history and context behind each specific ethnic church? 2) How is Christian unity to be understood, especially as it pertains to ecclesiology? 3) What is the church actually called to do, to whom is a local church called to minister, and how? Asking and answering these three questions from a neo-Calvinist perspective demonstrates ample biblical and theological support for the legitimate existence of ethnic churches.

5.1   *History and Context Often Legitimize Ethnic Churches*
So first, what is the history and context behind each specific ethnic church? When thinking theologically about the legitimacy of ethnic churches in multiethnic contexts, there is a temptation to think about them abstractly. This usually leads to a negative assessment of ethnic churches. But theology is always contextual and performed within history according to the needs of God's people. While Bavinck undoubtedly believed in the transcendent source of theology, he also wrote: "The whole of Christian theology … must develop itself, independently and freely … and thereby conjoin itself to the consciousness and life of the times, in which it appears and labours."[47] He also said that a requirement of dogmatics is that it must be "relevant, taking into consideration and corresponding to the needs of this generation, being progressive and striving for perfection."[48] Therefore, when discussing the theological merits of ethnic churches, it is important to consider their history and their context—in short, one must consider the relevant needs of the times in which these churches inhabit. After all, the very discussion of ethnic churches in multiethnic contexts is itself contextual and has not emerged from a vacuum.

The stories of three specific ethnic churches in multiethnic contexts demonstrate why history and context must not be ignored in a theological assessment

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47   Herman Bavinck, "Modernism and Orthodoxy," trans. Bruce Pass, *The Bavinck Review* 7 (2017): 103–104.

48   Herman Bavinck, "The Pros and Cons of a Dogmatic System," trans. Nelson Klosterman, *The Bavinck Review* 5 (2014): 97.

of ethnic churches. First, there was the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa, which supported and complied with the state's apartheid agenda, barring non-white participation in their churches from 1948 to 1991. Second, there is the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME), founded in 1787. The AME was established shortly after a few black Methodists were physically pulled from off their knees while praying because they were not confining themselves to the designated area for colored people at St. George's Methodist Episcopal Church. Furthermore, the black preachers in the Methodist Episcopal Church were only allowed to lead black congregations. Hence, the AME was founded for black Methodists seeking a place of worship unfettered by racism. Third, there is James Tan and the core group of Chinese immigrants, who planted Boston Chinese Evangelical Church in 1961 to distance themselves from the more liberal Chinese churches, and to minister to Cantonese speakers around Boston. In 1983, they added an English worship service and, in 1985, a Mandarin service.

Now, which of these ethnic churches is illegitimate? All of them? None of them? Some of them? Many may rightfully disapprove of the South African Dutch Reformed Church's enforcement of ethnic churches. But why? Was it inherently wrong for them to pursue the development of ethnic churches in South Africa? Or were they wrong for other reasons, such as their violation of human rights and liberties and their reinforcement of an agenda that sanctioned absolutely segregated churches and fostered inequality? What about the AME and Boston Chinese Evangelical Church? Was the AME divisive for founding a church unfettered by racism and extending the leadership of black Methodist pastors beyond racial boundaries? While one might fault Boston Chinese Evangelical Church for separating from the theologically liberal Chinese churches, was their desire to be an ethnic church that ministered to Cantonese speakers divisive? Moreover, by adding English and Mandarin services, was this Chinese church promoting inclusivity or exclusivity in the Greater Boston area? Such questions demand answers and should inform the theological assessment of the ethnic churches' legitimacy. If ethnic churches are not considered abstractly but examined according to their specific historical contexts, it becomes much easier to discern when and why certain ethnic churches are legitimate while certain other ethnic churches are not. It is fitting, then, to begin with, perhaps, the greatest historical challenge to this article's thesis concerning the legitimacy of ethnic churches, that is, the history of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa.

The Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa has been widely presented as an example of how theology can and has been used to foster racial injustice. The church's actions have also been presented as an example of how Kuyperian theology in particular was used to support racial injustice. Although convinced

that Kuyper would probably not have supported apartheid and cannot be directly held responsible for the racial injustices of the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa, Baskwell argues that Kuyper's idea of sphere sovereignty and its pillarizing ("*verzuiling*") implications were somewhat appropriated by Afrikaner theologians in their pluralistic context of ethnic diversity. Baskwell argues that this (mis)appropriation of Kuyper's thought led these Dutch Reformed theologians to support Afrikaner nationalism and, hence, apartheid.[49]

This, of course, presents a challenge to the legitimacy of ethnic churches based on the neo-Calvinist tradition, yet it also condemns the Dutch Reformed Church's somewhat neo-Kuyperian move toward monoethnic churches in South Africa during apartheid. Is not the Dutch Reformed Church a glaring example, not only of the evils of ethnic churches, but also of the neo-Calvinist tradition? For those who affirm the multiethnic mandate, even the most upright ethnic churches are still in the same league as the segregation-enforcing Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa. Any notion of ethnic churches conjures up the evils of inequality, exclusivity, and division. Yet, what is often missed in this equivocation of all ethnic churches is that the Dutch Reformed Church stands condemned not simply because it desired ethnic churches, but because of its racially unjust motives and its violation of human liberties. The South African Dutch Reformed Church's advancement of ethnic churches was clearly wrong and contrary to the gospel, but it was not because of any evil inherent within ethnic churches. The injustice of ethnic church formation during apartheid was the *mandate* that all people worship in monoethnic churches. The power of the sword was not wielded to defend the freedom of worshipers, but to inhibit it. Hence, the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa was actually acting contrary to Kuyper's thought when they affirmed the State's use of power in enforcing ethnically segregated churches. After all, Kuyper very much prized individual liberties, and his notion of pillarization always included a voluntary aspect.[50]

When considering the history of the AME, one can see an entirely different motive for the establishment of an ethnic church. Whereas the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa's pursuit of ethnic churches restricted the freedom of worship under threat of the sword, the AME pursued an ethnic church of their own in order to exercise their liberties as Christian worshipers apart from the threat of violence. The AME was established in order that African

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49   Patrick Baskwell, "Kuyper and Apartheid: A Revisiting," *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 62, no. 4 (2006): 1277–1284.

50   Baskwell, "Kuyper and Apartheid," 1285, 1289.

American Christians might worship freely, fully exercise their gifts, and pursue their individual callings to ministry without the distractions of racism and white supremacy inhibiting their worship. Admittedly, one might question whether sin and racial injustice in a particular local church legitimatize the actions of Christians who leave and establish their own local church in the same region. But how many Evangelicals today would seriously question the legitimacy of the Southern Baptist Convention, or the Presbyterian Church in America (previously the "Southern Presbyterian Church"), both of which seceded from their previous denominational affiliations in order to defend slavery, and continued to enforce racial segregation within their own churches late into the twentieth century? One might argue that the Southern Baptists and the Southern Presbyterians left their denominations to preserve their own ethnic churches, which focused on and privileged Americans of European descent. Furthermore, such a question concerning when Christians are justifiably permitted to exit a church and establish a new one does not directly bear on the question of ethnic churches in multiethnic contexts. At the very least, one must concede that whereas the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa pursued ethnic churches with unjust intentions and contrary to the principle of human liberties, the AME pursued their own ethnic church for the sake of justice and liberty.

The history of Boston Chinese Evangelical Church also differs in its context and motivations. First of all, it was planted in order to minister to Cantonese-speaking Chinese immigrants, which seems to be the one exception that legitimizes ethnic churches in much of the multiethnic mandate discourse. One might question, however, why an ethnic church in a multiethnic context should establish an English ministry. Without the language barrier, should not Chinese Christians in America worship in English outside of ethnic churches for the sake of unity? Whereas the motives surrounding the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa and the AME church dealt primarily with issues of justice, the story of Boston Chinese Evangelical Church is centered on its mission endeavors. Its mission statement does not only mention its distinct sense of calling to evangelize the Chinese in the Greater Boston area, but it also explicitly includes the words "and the world." Nothing in this Chinese church explicitly prevents anyone of another ethnicity from worshiping there. Thus, while some might see the addition of an English ministry as divisive and exclusive, others might just as well see their addition of an English ministry as inclusive. For would one not applaud a historically white English-speaking church in America for its inclusivity if it added a Spanish-speaking Latino ministry? Hence, Boston Chinese Evangelical Church is an example of an ethnic church that is in many ways more inclusive than even monolingual multiethnic churches.

These stories problematize the flat and simplistic notion that ethnic churches in multiethnic contexts are inherently divisive and 'unbiblical.' Considering the histories and contexts out of which real ethnic churches have come into existence demonstrates that the stories behind each ethnic church will and should affect any discussion about the theological merits of ethnic churches. Merely considering whether or not ethnic churches are 'biblical' in the abstract prevents one from considering the context-specific factors surrounding the very reasons for pursuing ethnic and multiethnic churches. A Bavinckian approach to theologically assessing ethnic churches is not opposed to starting with the phenomenon of ethnic churches, rather than abstractly developing principles in an acontextual way.[51] Context-specific factors indicate that there are a variety of reasons why ethnic and multiethnic local churches might be established within multiethnic communities, and that there are good and bad reasons for both.

5.2 *Christian Unity is Organic and Not Necessarily Jeopardized by Ethnic Churches*

The next question to consider: How is Christian unity to be understood, especially as it pertains to ecclesiology? Abraham Kuyper wrote: "[U]nity is the ultimate goal of all the ways of God."[52] A superficial reading might lend support to arguments against ethnic churches based on certain mechanical understandings of Christian unity. For example, in a sermon on Psalm 133, Kuyper expounded upon "how blessed and good a thing it is when brothers dwell in unity." In this sermon, he explained that such dwelling together required the church to be the real place of human reconciliation, where people from all kinds of backgrounds become family and learn to live together in fellowship.[53] He even wrote the following instructions for church planting in Java: "While in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, and by consequence neither a Javanese nor a Dutchman, believers in Java should live together in one church, whatever their race or nationality is. The only justifiable reason for separation is difference in confession, church polity (hierarchy), or language."[54] Hence, with exceptions made for those of different languages and theological persuasions,

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51   George Harinck, "Wipe Out Lines of Division (Not Distinctions): Bennie Keet, Neo-Calvinism and the Struggle against Apartheid," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 11, nos. 1–2 (2017): 91.

52   Abraham Kuyper, "Uniformity: The Curse of Modern Life," in *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader*, ed. James D. Bratt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 21.

53   Abraham Kuyper, *De Zegen des Heeren over Onze Kerken*, 10 August 1896.

54   Abraham Kuyper, *Acta der generale synode van de Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland, gehouden te Middelburg, van 11 aug. tot 4 sept. 1896* (Leiden, 1897), 74.

Kuyper's sermon on Psalm 133 and his church planting instructions might indicate a strong preference for multiethnic churches. But Kuyper had more to say.

While Christian unity is of paramount importance, Kuyper also taught that fallen creation is always in danger of uniformity, a counterfeit unity. Hence, a Kuyperian assessment of whether ethnic churches are divisive must take Kuyper's vehement opposition to the curse of uniformity just as seriously as his desire for unity.[55] This should be applied to the many evangelical churches in America today that claim to be multiethnic. A cursory observation of most multiethnic churches in America would reveal uniformity according to a white American evangelical subculture. Soong-Chan Rah commends the movement away from the assimilationist melting pot analogy, but has been quick to observe that in the newer salad bowl analogy the mixed salad is often overwhelmed by white Ranch dressing.[56] This is not to disparage the white American evangelical subculture, nor the noble aspirations of multiethnic churches, but to highlight how the supposed unity of multiethnic churches often falls short of ideal Christian unity in diversity. One might even say that a church like Boston Chinese Evangelical Church evidences greater unity in diversity with its worshipers from Hong Kong, Boston, Taiwan, and Mainland China, speaking Cantonese, Mandarin, and English. All this is to say that multiethnicity is often rather superficial, and multiculturalism even more elusive.

Furthermore, when multiethnic churches are promoted as superior to ethnic churches because they supposedly reflect greater Christian unity, they betray a mechanical understanding of unity in diversity. Some evangelicals point to Revelation 7:9's eschatological vision of one body comprised of many nations, tribes, and tongues. They then assert that an already-not-yet eschatology demands the pursuit of this eschatological church's diversity in our local churches. However, they fail to acknowledge that scripture does not tell us how the nations, tribes, and tongues are assembled. Is the vision of Revelation 7 more like a mixed bowl of M&Ms or a bowl of M&Ms with all its colors assembled in the bowl as in a pie chart? Regardless of their arrangement, they are united within one bowl. Furthermore, it is unclear how Revelation 7 should apply to every local church. Surely a local church in South Korea is not obliged to reflect the all-nations diversity of Revelation 7. Pursuing a church demographic that proportionally matches that of the community might be a noteworthy benchmark for certain churches, but to impose this particular vision of

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55 Kuyper, "Uniformity: The Curse of Modern Life," 19–44.

56 Soong-Chan Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism: Freeing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2009), 86.

unity and diversity upon a local church is mechanistic, especially since technology has fundamentally altered conceptions of many Western communities' bounds. How many Christians who live in multiethnic societies actually worship at the most closely located Christian church to their home?[57] Binding local churches to the norm of multiethnicity is mechanistic if our conception of church unity is absolutely bound by spatial location.

According to Kuyper, Christian unity is organic. He writes: "The one body of Christ manifests itself differently in different countries, provinces, and regions, and even in neighboring villages and cities … The ordination of God's providential plan and decree divided the church into local … churches, but the unity of the body of Christ keeps these individual parts together in an organic connection."[58] Kuyper appreciates the providentially diverse ways in which local churches such as the AME and Boston Chinese Evangelical Church are formed. Therefore, organic Christian unity can be reflected in both multiethnic and ethnic churches.

Other critics of ethnic churches point to passages such as Ephesians 2 and Galatians 3, which speak of a new humanity or a new identity in Christ and the gospel's destruction of social divisions. John Howard Yoder paraphrased these texts: "If one is in Christ, there is a whole new world. Ethnic standards have ceased to count."[59] Mark Kreitzer, a VanTillian missiologist, rightly rejects this way of thinking about ethnicity. Contrary to those who view the multiformity of peoples at the Tower of Babel as a mere curse, Kreitzer follows Kuyper's interpretation. While the sinners at Shinar pursued an empire of uniformity, God scattered them into peoples according to his original pre-fall plan for human multiformity.[60] The existence of distinct nations and peoples was divinely ordained, and this rich diversity of tribes, tongues, and nations was always an eschatological goal.[61]

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57   According to the Pew Research Center, Americans valued the quality of sermons, feeling welcomed by leaders, and the style of services more than location when choosing a new church. See Pew Research Center, August 23, 2016, "Choosing a New Church or House of Worship," http://www.pewforum.org/2016/08/23/choosing-a-new-church-or-house-of-worship/ (accessed May 23, 2018).

58   Abraham Kuyper, "Tract on the Reformation of the Churches," in *On the Church*, ed. John Halsey Wood, Jr. and Andrew McGinnis (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2016), 115.

59   John H. Yoder, "The Social Shape of the Gospel," in *Exploring Church Growth*, ed. Wilbert Shenk (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 283.

60   Abraham Kuyper, "The Tower of Babel," in *Common Grace*, vol. 1, ed. Jordan Ballor and Stephen Grabill (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2016), 357–364.

61   Abraham Kuyper, "Spiritual Unity," in *Pro Rege*, vol. 1, ed. Nelson Kloosterman (Bellingham: Lexham Press, 2016), 225.

Utilizing the same Second Adam Christology of Bavinck, Kreitzer argues that while there is a new creational unity in the Second Adam, it does not erase creational particularities. Just as Jesus rose from the grave as a physical, Galilean Jewish male, so also will New Covenant believers retain their gender and ethnolinguistic particularities. "Biblical Christianity is therefore not platonic-gnostic with a de-particularized non-ethnic, androgynous person as the ideal … Redemptive history does not move away from so-called divisive social identities of the first creation, but rather establishes them in mature and restored form."[62] Following Cornelius Van Til, Kreitzer maintains the equal ultimacy of unity and diversity.[63] He asserts that any false unity that would destroy ethnic identity in Christ has succumbed to social Unitarianism. For the God-ordained diversity of ethnicities among a united humanity reflects God's triunity. This is in sharp opposition to those who believe that the New Covenant terminates ethnic distinctiveness, and hence delegitimizes ethnic churches. Accordingly, Bavinck wrote: "Though the division of humanity into peoples and languages was occasioned by sin, it has something good in it, which is brought into the church and thus preserved for eternity."[64] Therefore, if ethnic distinctions were divinely ordained and remain in the New Creation, arguments against ethnic churches based on a new nonethnic identity in Christ lose their clout.

Furthermore, one might also ask whether the multiethnic mandate is too local church-centric. After all, the universal church is undoubtedly multiethnic, but is it truly reasonable to mandate that all local churches also be multiethnic? According to Herman Ridderbos, a redemptive-historical understanding of *ekklesia* indicates that "the universal church is primary and the local church … can be denoted as *ekklesia* because the universal *ekklesia* is revealed and represented in them."[65] Hence, the multiethnic mandate really only becomes a problem for those who would (incorrectly, according to Ridderbos) emphasize the local church over the universal church in their understanding of *ekklesia*.

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62   Mark Kreitzer, *The Concept of Ethnicity in the Bible* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 2008), 394–395.

63   Cornelius Van Til, *An Introduction to Systematic Theology: Prolegomena and the Doctrines of Revelation, Scripture, and God*, ed. William Edgar (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing, 1955), 233–234.

64   Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 4, *Holy Spirit, Church and New Creation*, ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), 319.

65   Herman Ridderbos, *Paul: An Outline of His Theology*, trans. John Richard De Witt (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 330.

All this is to say that organic Christian unity is not at all disturbed by the formation of real-life ethnic churches, nor by the God-ordained particularity of ethnicity itself. More accurately, it may be more divisive to criticize ethnic churches as unbiblical than to form an ethnic church.

5.3   *The Church is Called to Minister to the World Contextually*

The final questions to consider are: What is the church called to do? To whom is a local church called to minister, and how?

Kuyper believed that the church was "called to the work of philanthropy, of evangelism, and of mission."[66] Within these duties Kuyper believed that the local church's ministry was primarily to those of the household of faith, per Galatians 6:10. The local church must also evangelize locally, however, and send missionaries to other unchurched regions. From this, one discerns a centrifugally ordered priority that begins within the local church and extends to the ends of the earth.

A commonsense evangelical argument for the superiority of multiethnic churches is that the local church should "strive to reach everyone." But this argument is vague. It does not demonstrate what it means to "strive to reach everyone" or which methods of striving are permissible. It is not clear that targeting certain people or focusing on ministry toward a particular ethnic group or having "African" or "Korean" in a church's name would transgress the visible aspects of church life that Christ instituted. Neither is it clear that doing such is an automatically exclusive action. Viewed more positively, focusing on ministry to a people group might indicate the pursuit of contextualized ministry and the centrifugal extension of the church. Creativity and contextuality must be valued and appreciated in church ministry. Eglinton reminds us that Bavinck himself "as a young minister in rural, culturally conservative Franeker ... initiated several (contextually) bold changes to the workings of local congregational life."[67] For his "clear definition of that which Christ instituted gave him a healthy perspective on the aspects of the visible church life not instituted by Christ."[68] Might the multiethnic mandate be included as one aspect of the visible church not explicitly instituted by Christ for every local church?

In every local church, ethnic and multiethnic alike, the leaders will make contextual decisions about how to minister to their congregation and their

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66   Abraham Kuyper, "Tract on the Reformation of the Churches," 161.

67   James Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism: Towards a New Reading of Herman Bavinck's Organic Motif* (London: T&T Clark, 2012), 194.

68   Eglinton, *Trinity and Organism*, 194.

community. They will inevitably focus more or less of their time, resources, and attention toward certain things and people than toward others, and priorities will be different across a variety of local churches, even in the same region. Most local churches play their strengths according to their context, stewarding whatever gifts God has given them. In fact, playing to one's strengths is precisely what Tim Keller, largely dependent upon the neo-Calvinist tradition himself, suggests.[69] Surely stewardship may include the utilization of one's ethnicity. Of course, focusing on an ethnic group is certainly not the *only* way to do contextual ministry, but can it not be one legitimate way?

Might the ministry of ethnic churches be one way of promoting the rich, God-ordained diversity and multiformity that Kuyper so passionately believed in? Kuyper insisted that the people of Indonesia not be made "Dutch" to become Christians, but that they be made into "Javanese Christians in whose domestic and social life a spiritual life will flow according to its own character and form."[70] Might not an ethnically Javanese church helpfully serve this end? Richard Mouw is confident that neo-Calvinism can serve such an end for the global church in the twenty-first century.[71] For Bavinck anticipates that "tribes, people, and nations all make their own particular contribution to the enrichment of life in the new Jerusalem."[72]

Racial reconciliation and unity must not come at the price of diversity and cultural development. Recognizing many simplistic attempts toward racial reconciliation that do not empower and nurture the cultures of ethnic minorities, Kuyperian theologian Anthony Bradley wrote: "Racial reconciliation misunderstands homogeneous ethnic churches as outmoded. This, in part, has much to do with many whites denying that they have cultural norms and the failure to recognize that ethnic minorities do need cultural centers for survival."[73]

The body of Christ is filled with a diversity of gifts and contextual callings, all shaped by the reality of ethnicity. Should not this principle of diversity apply to

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69   Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 301.

70   Kuyper, "Uniformity: The Curse of Modern Life," 40–41.

71   Richard Mouw, "Neo-Calvinism: A Theology for the Global Church in the 21st Century," Herman Bavinck Lecture from Theological University Kampen, Kampen, The Netherlands, June 1, 2015.

72   Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 4, *Holy Spirit, Church and New Creation*, ed. John Bolt (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 727.

73   Anthony Bradley, "Moving toward Racial Solidarity," *World Magazine*, September 7, 2011, http://www.worldmag.com/2011/09/moving_toward_racial_solidarity (accessed November 30, 2017).

how local churches do ministry as well? Is not the ministry of ethnic churches one of many legitimate expressions of all local churches' diverse and contextual ministry to the world and an active mode of opposing the curse of uniformity?

6   Conclusion

While Kuyper did instruct the churches in Java that the only acceptable reasons for separating churches were based on confession, liturgy, or language, much of neo-Calvinist thought, including Kuyper's own thought, seems to indicate that there are more acceptable reasons than just the three that he mentioned, especially when one takes specific contexts into consideration. In the discussion of ethnic churches and multiethnic churches, we are confronted with the perennial challenge of unity and diversity.

The challenge of unity and diversity remains for ministers today. In a 2011 video clip, Tim Keller was asked for his thoughts on racially homogeneous churches. Keller displays his usual thoughtfulness and sensitivity, but his answer is not simple. On one hand, and with an emphasis on unity, he says that he heavily counsels "all" churches to be as multiethnic as their geographical neighborhoods, seemingly affirming the multiethnic mandate. But on the other hand, and with an emphasis on diversity, he says he realizes that ethnic churches have a lot to lose by pursuing this, and that he does not want to make them feel that somehow they are doing wrong by staying monoethnic.[74] Like Kuyper, who wanted the Dutch and the Javanese to worship together, yet also wanted the Javanese to be full-fledged Javanese Christians, Keller desires two good things, even if it means living in tension between them. Keller concludes: "I don't see much of a role for a purely white church anymore, but I do see a role for the ethnic churches." Here in Keller's conclusion, one can discern a contextualized response. In twenty-first-century America, with its racial history, its white majority culture, and its cities' increasing ethnic diversity, Keller cannot see how one could justify a "purely white church" in a multiethnic context, but he does believe that there are still good and legitimate reasons for the existence of other kinds of ethnic churches. Because he values church unity he cannot accept the existence of all ethnic churches in all contexts (especially not a white church in a white majority culture with a violent history of racism against nonwhites, such as the United States), and yet he values diversity

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74   Timothy Keller, "On Churches and Race," *Big Think* (website), 2011, http://bigthink.com/videos/tim-keller-on-churches-and-race (accessed December 5, 2017).

enough to understand why the existence of certain ethnic churches in certain contexts might be worthwhile and appropriate.

Keller's intuition finds much support in this article. To summarize the main points: 1) the absolute claim that ethnic churches are inherently inferior or more divisive than multiethnic churches in multiethnic contexts is very difficult to substantiate if one pays attention to the unique histories and contexts of specific ethnic churches. 2) Furthermore, true Christian unity is organic and not jeopardized by ethnic churches or God-ordained ethnic particularity. 3) Lastly, ethnic churches are not at odds with the local churches' calling to minister to the world. Rather, ethnic churches are one contextual way of heeding this call.

Admittedly, ethnic churches often fail to maintain a clear testimony. And without careful guardrails, Kuyper's theology could and has fostered ethnocentrism, ghettoization, and even racism, as witnessed in South Africa's apartheid. But such ills are not inherent to ethnic churches or to neo-Calvinism, especially if one affirms Kuyper's equal emphasis on diversity, his defense of the liberty of conscience, and the voluntarism of his free church ecclesiology.[75] Therefore the Lausanne Committee was correct and wise in their 1977 evaluation of ethnically homogeneous local churches:

> All of us are agreed that in many situations a homogeneous unit church can be a legitimate and authentic church. Yet we are also agreed that it can never be complete in itself. Indeed, if it remains in isolation, it cannot reflect the universality and diversity of the Body of Christ. Nor can it grow into maturity. Therefore, every HU church must take active steps to broaden its fellowship in order to demonstrate visibly the unity and the variety of Christ's church. This will mean forging with other and different churches creative relationships which express the reality of Christian love, brotherhood, and interdependence.[76]

May God ever help all his local churches to better reflect the unity and diversity of his perfect purposes.

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75   John Halsey Wood, Jr., *Going Dutch in the Modern Age: Abraham Kuyper's Struggle for a Free Church in the Netherlands* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 105–106.

76   Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, "LOP 1—The Pasadena Consultation: Homogeneous Unit Principle," 1977, https://www.lausanne.org/content/lop/lop-1#8.