A BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL APPROACH TO RETAINING THE NEXT GENERATION IN CANADIAN-CHINESE DIASPORA CHURCHES AND DOING MISSION

By Matthew Todd

Statement of the Problem

One of the critical issues facing Chinese diaspora churches in the Asia Pacific Region, specifically in Western Canada, is the 'silent exodus' of their next generation. In 2014, I had completed a six-year study with the primary intention to identify key factors as to why English-speaking Chinese adults exit (i.e., defect from, apostatize from, leave) Canadian-Chinese bicultural[1] churches—a problem Helen Lee has termed a "silent exodus."[2] A secondary purpose of the study was to recommend some leadership strategies towards the longitudinal retention[3] of these adults through English ministry congregations. I firmly believe that transformational leaders can develop healthier congregations that maximize missional capacity.

The model and structure for English ministries is an area of concern. Almost all Canadian-Chinese churches operate their English congregations as a youth ministry or as an 'associated dependent parallel congregation.' This system can also be called a 'parent-child model,' in which the Chinese congregation is the parent and the English congregation is the child. However, once the English

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[1]Biculturalism is defined as having one's foot in two cultural worlds and "navigating through the hills and valleys of each." Rutledge M Dennis, ed., *Biculturalism, Self-Identity and Societal Transformation*, vol. 15 of *Research in Race and Ethnic Relations* (Bingley, UK: Emerald Group Publishing, 2008), 6. The book notes that…"being bicultural means theoretically [that one is] not [yet] being assimilated" (5).

[2]Helen Lee, "Silent Exodus: Can the East Asian Church in America Reverse the Flight of Its Next Generation?," *Christianity Today* 40, no. 12 (August 12, 1996).

[3]This objective resonates with Jonathan Wu's question…"Is there anything [English-speaking Asian adult] home congregations can do or could have done to serve better or retain them longer?" Johnathan Wu, "Trusting Households," in *Growing Healthy Asian American Churches*, ed. Peter Cha, S. Steve Jang, and Helen Lee (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 107.

congregation matures into adulthood and becomes intergenerational, enforcing a "systemic dependence on the Chinese-speaking congregation"[4] becomes a significant factor in the silent-exodus phenomenon. If these churches switched to an 'associated independent parallel congregation model,' more people would more likely remain in these maturing English congregations, and fewer of them would leave the church.

Addressing the silent exodus and promoting development of a parallel independent congregation model in Chinese bicultural churches are intended to advance the fulfillment of Jesus' Great Commission. In Chinese bicultural churches, the networks of the English congregations tend to be more heterogeneous and multiethnic than those of the overseas-born Chinese congregations. For this reason, bicultural Chinese churches have unrealized potential to reach their communities (the nations) through their English congregations. But what if resistance towards egalitarianism and the associated parallel independent congregation model creates a barrier that makes it more difficult for the English congregation to bring in other races? The question might be . . . Is Jesus' Great Commission (i.e., reaching all nations) applicable to ethnic churches?

An emerging area of study has been in the interrelationship between religion and ethnicity.[5] The literature indicates that a major motivation for immigrants to create or join congregations composed of fellow immigrants is to share their ethnic backgrounds (e.g., traditions, customs, languages) and transmit their ethnicity to the next generation.[6] In other words, there is a vested interest in maintaining a cultural context different from that of the broader intercultural/multicultural society/denomination the church is in.

I have spent a good deal of research and ministry time on both the question of incremental assimilation versus rigid preservation of a distinctive cultural identity for ethnic churches and the question of the role religious organizations play in endorsing either assimilation or

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[4]Marcus Tso, "English Adult Ministry in the Canadian-Chinese Churches," *MB Chinese Herald* 48 (August 2005): 6-8. The author points out that with this model…"the Chinese-speaking board continues to be the real decision maker, without any plan for a cultural/language and generational transition."

[5]Pyong Gap Min and Jung Ha Kim, eds. *Religions in Asian America: Building Faith Communities* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002). Paul Bramadat and David Seljak, eds. *Christianity and Ethnicity in Canada (* Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 2008).

[6]Helen Rose Ebaugh and Janet S. Chafetz, "Chinese Gospel Church: The Sinicization of Christianity," *Religion and the New Immigrants*, 180 ff.

cultural preservation. Members of ethnic churches in Canada opt to practice their faith in a manner that preserves ethnic identity; or they take an approach that allows incremental, selective adaptation to Canadian culture. While many laud the fact that Canada no longer espouses an assimilationist model for its immigrants, there can be an assumption that immigrant churches are going to be comfortable with practicing *carte blanche* multiculturalism. Ample research is available that suggests these churches experience a significant amount of tension in the transmission of their religious and ethnic identity to the next generation. My observation has been that ethnic churches tend to be very successful in reaching immigrants of their own ethnicity—for which I am thankful.

It is also obvious that an ethnic church will be especially effective in evangelizing non-believers that belong to its ethnic group (homogeneous unit). One could think of ethnic churches as 'midwives' who help first-generation Christians with cultural transition and the transmission of faith. They also try to do a good job of nurturing early faith in their second generation. For example, English-language congregations in Chinese churches have been established to 'keep their kids' and to transmit faith and Chinese culture. The problem is that, for a high percentage of these churches, the immigrant group expects the emerging English-language congregations to follow its example in mission—that is, reaching out exclusively to the same immigrant group, even though the English congregations have wider social networks.

Churches of any ethnicity can function partly as cultural societies. Now the question is…Because there are ethnic churches that may have such a vested interest in preserving and reproducing their cultural traditions, customs, and language, does Jesus' Great Commission to "go and make disciples of *all nations*" (Matthew 28:19) apply to cultural churches? Are ethnic churches 'off the hook,' so to speak, from participating in, initiating, and commissioning cross-cultural, multiethnic, and multiracial outreach, mission, and evangelism or from establishing parallel associated but independent English congregations that are autonomous in mission?

I find it meaningful to remind myself how Christ started the new era of the church. It was with a more inclusive idea about who the new family of God would embrace.[7] Every human being bears the image of

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[7]My theology also comes from examples in scripture of the Lord incorporating multiethnic peoples into the family of God. These include Ruth, a Moabite (Ruth 1:4); Rahab, a Canaanite (Joshua 6:22-23); Uriah the Hittite (2 Samuel 11:3); a Roman

God and, therefore, is eternally valuable to him (Genesis 1:27).[8] Every race was precious enough for the Creator of the universe to give his only Son to die (John. 3:16). Thus, it is wise to embrace the Lord's opinion and the priority he puts on 'the world.' One of the features of human fallenness/brokenness can be an inability to grasp the scope of who the new spiritual family includes—redeemed people from every nation. In the Old Testament, the Jews frequently seemed to struggle with keeping the faith as an ethnic faith, but God intended them to be a 'light to the nations' (Isaiah 42:6). Certainly, while there is some scriptural evidence of non-Jews coming to faith, there is considerably more of God having to judge the people of Israel, in part because of their treatment of foreigners (e.g., Malachi 3:1-5, Zechariah 7:10-14).

When the Christian church first got started, it was an ethnic church, and there is evidence that many Christian Jews continued to struggle with, including people of other ethnic backgrounds (see Acts 15). One of the early tensions in the Christian Jewish community was with other Jews who were culturally different. The local-born Jews were having a problem with overseas-born Jews. For example, "Grecian" Jews were overlooked in the distribution of food; they looked like Jews but were bicultural, part of the Jewish Diaspora (Acts 6:1). Luke pointed out that they were among the "Jews from every nation" (Acts 2:5).[9]

The first generation of Christian Jews also struggled with cultural/racial biases over other Christian Jews taking the gospel to different people groups. For instance, Peter struggled with the Holy Spirit over associating with those not of his race—e.g. Cornelius (of the

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(Matthew 8:5); a Greek (Mark 7:24-30); and many Samaritans (John. 4:39-42). The book of Acts focuses on the spread of the gospel to the world—from one ethnic group to another (Acts 17). Christ's Great Commission and his heart for the ethnic groups of the world is very clear (Matthew 28:19, Mark 16:15). Additionally, my theology for harmonious multiethnic living comes from Paul's teachings, including Galatians 3:26-28: "You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free [poor or rich], male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." In advocating for parallel independent congregations, it is important to also focus on what Christians hold in common: "There is one body and one spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it" (Ephesians 4:4-7).

[8]Wayne Grudem comments that, "This has profound implications for our conduct towards others [that every culture and] race deserve equal dignity and rights." Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994)*,* 450.

[9]Some Canadian-born Chinese have expressed to overseas-born Chinese leaders that their experience were similar to this story.

Italian Regiment) and other gentiles (Acts 10:9-48); the impression is that he would have preferred segregation (see Acts 11, Galatians 2:11-13). But in obeying the Holy Spirit, he witnessed the outpouring of God's presence, causing him to conclude . . . "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right. Jesus Christ is Lord of all" (Acts 10:34). Luke records the criticism Peter received from the Christian-Jewish ethnic church for focusing gospel initiatives outside the Jewish race and culture (see Acts 11). Jewish believers' obedience in sharing the Good News sparked a multiracial/multicultural church in Antioch (Acts 11:19-21). Peter had to "revision and rethink [his] theological paradigm" and make a shift.[10]

Three Observations

The Lord Gave the Great Commission to an
Ethnic Group of Jewish Men

Jesus said, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to *all* creation" (Mark 16:15). His followers were to begin among their own ethnicity, but they weren't to stop there; they were to reach out to "Jerusalem . . . Judea . . . Samaria . . . the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Despite the fact that Jesus had clearly instructed that the gospel was to be spread to every nation, too many in the first-generation Jerusalem Christian-Jewish church were reluctant to be inclusive of other nationalities in evangelism. Many, but not all, didn't show a lot of enthusiasm for reaching other races/cultures with the gospel.

The Lord Specifically Intervened to Call Out Individuals of the
First-Generation Ethnic Church

If it wasn't for God's direct intervention (e.g., Peter's vision, Paul's calling), one wonders how long it would have taken for the early church to be mobilized to do world evangelism. However, two persecutions—40 AD and 70 AD—forcibly scattered Jewish Christians

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[10]Ray S. Anderson, "The Praxis of the Spirit as Liberation for Ministry," in *The Soul of Ministry: Forming Leaders for God's People* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 118.

from Jerusalem to geographical areas that were more multiethnic.[11] Paul especially found himself challenging people of his own ethnicity about their sin in keeping the gospel 'ethnic' instead of offering it to people of other ethnicities. He knew his ultimate identity as a citizen of heaven was greater than his ethnic background (Philippians 3:20). On more than one occasion, Paul felt compelled to tell the church that the Lord had made all of the redeemed into one family:

- "[Jesus] has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility" (Ephesians 2:13-14).
- "His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility" (Ephesians 2:15-17).
- "The Gentiles are heirs, together with Israel, members together of one body, sharers together in the promise of Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 3:6).
- "We will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together . . . grows and builds itself up in love" (Ephesians 4:15-16).

Paul found himself having to challenge those of his own ethnicity for showing prejudice in evangelism and even for treating differently those Christians who did not share the Jewish ethnicity (Galatians 1:7-10, 2:11-16). He even took Peter to task for behaving as if one race was better than another and for dividing the church (Galatians 2:13). This second-class treatment of gentile Christians (via in the matters of withdrawal/separation during fellowship and hospitality) was basically canceling out all that Peter and Paul had preached to people who were of a different ethnicity—that the gospel was for all ethnicities/cultures/races and that all would become equal in the family of God. Paul did not hesitate to label the second-class treatment of other Christian ethnicities as hypocritical and out of line with the gospel. He had to remind the Jewish ethnic church that . . . "There is neither Jew nor Greek, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28). Jesus spoke of others not yet reached with the gospel and of bringing them together into one flock (John 10:16). Paul taught that

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[11]Earle E. Cairns, "To the Jew First," in *Christianity Through the Centuries: A History of the Christian Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 56, 58.

the body of Christ was to be racially and culturally diverse—"whether Jews or Greeks" (1 Corinthians 12-13)—and that for the Christian to have feelings of ethnic superiority was a sin (Philippians 2:1-8).

In the Bible, God is never found affirming racial, ethnic, or cultural segregation, only religious segregation—"Let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers" (Galatians 6:10). It is true that Paul was mindful of his ethnicity as a starting point in evangelism—"to the Jew first" (Acts 19:8-10, 26:20). But he didn't stop there, taking the gospel to those culturally removed. Heaven will be multiracial and multicultural (Revelation 7:9), and one day all cultures will bow before Christ (Ephesians 1:10, Philippians 2:6-11).

In light of this clear biblical teaching, ethnic churches should be seen as the beginning, not the end, of God's vision for his church. Biblically and historically, diaspora churches are also called to engage in cross-cultural mission. So here's the real question . . . If Christ commanded his Christian-Jewish ethnic followers to make disciples of all nations, how can any Christian individual or church be exempt from the Great Commission today? The development of associated independent parallel English-speaking congregations is one optional step towards fulfilling Christ's mission.

The Gospel Moved from Being an Ethnic Enclave to Crossing Cultural and Ethnic Boundaries

If Christians want to know what they are supposed to be doing, sometimes it helps to see a vision of where they are going. The Apostle John provides a picture of the whole family of God singing before the living God Almighty—a group of worshipers "from every tribe and language and people and nation standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb" (Revelation 5:9-10; 7:9). How can heaven be so racially diverse? In part, the people of God are diverse because of the obedience of Christian leaders in every generation to go out of their 'comfort zones' to reach others who are racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse. The will of God is that all of the redeemed would be one on earth as they will be in heaven (John 17:22). Isaiah said that the desire of God for his church is that it be a "house of prayer for all nations" (Isaiah 56:7). When Jesus quoted that that passage, the religious leaders feared him. They didn't want the nations to worship with them, so they looked for a way to kill Jesus and his mission (Mark 11:17-18).

How can people who are heavily invested in their cultural identity be brought to where they begin to invest in cross-cultural/intercultural outreach? The place to begin is to do an effective job of teaching people that God loves the world—not just their own ethnicities, but every nation. They need to grasp the reality that their present and eternal identities are to be found in this multiethnic global family of God. For this reason, church leaders should make certain that their churches' mission (expressed in their statement of faith[12]) is based on the Great Commission. It is one thing to talk about these truths, yet another to put them into practice. Church leaders should then ask if their churches are comfortable with multicultural expressions within their particular contexts.

Scripture shows clearly what the new spiritual family of Christ is supposed to look like.[13] Today, Christianity is no longer identified strictly with its historic first-century ethnicity.[14] Rather, it is a global faith family. Out of many ethnicities and races, God has created a new multiethnic nation (1 Peter 2:9)—the family of God. Christians are called to obey the Lord in this area, to work for unity in the body of Christ, and to advance Christ's kingdom beyond barriers of race and culture.

Since the Kingdom of God is to be multiracial, then no ethnic church can relinquish its responsibility to obey Jesus' Great Commission to reach all nations. In fact, in bicultural Chinese churches (i.e., those that have English-speaking congregations), the capacity for evangelism may be even greater because of the members' transnational and multicultural social networks. There is a parallel between Canadian-born Chinese and Timothy, who was bicultural, a hybrid who successfully did mission among two cultures—Jewish and gentile (Acts 16:1-5, 1 Timothy 1:3).

One of the significant ways a bicultural church can carry out Jesus' Great Commission is to release, resource, bless, and affirm its English congregation to do mission in ways that are authentic for that congregation. One such way is to make it an associated independent parallel congregation. As wonderful as the Chinese cultural heritage

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[12]Many Chinese churches say in the statements of faith on their websites that they value spreading the gospel and missions. Many of them are in multicultural communities, but the ethnic composition of their churches is not representative of their communities.

[13]1 Timothy 5:1-2, 2 Corinthians 6:18, Matthew 12:49-50, 1 John 3:14-18; Grudem, 858.

[14]By the second century, the Christian church was no longer Jewish but predominantly gentile.

may be, I hope that every Chinese Christian church has a greater mission for its English congregation than just 'keeping our kids with us' and 'transmitting our ethnicity' to the next generation. When leaders in Chinese churches see the Holy One face to face (Revelation 22:4, 2 Corinthians 5:10), they will be made keenly aware of whether they have obeyed the heart of God in mission; their "work will be shown for what it is," whether its foundations were in Christ (1 Corinthians 3:12-13, 2 Corinthians 5:10, Romans 2:6-11, 14:10,12, Revelation 20:12,15). An English ministry needs a spiritual vision rooted in Christ's mission. The networks of an English congregation in a Chinese church tend to straddle two cultures. This bicultural reality should be acknowledged, nurtured, commissioned, and released, in many cases through an associated independent parallel congregation.

Further Theology Towards the Retention of
English-speaking Adults Associated with
Chinese Churches

Theology for Cultural Transition/The Creation of Subcultures

Humanity makes culture because human beings are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27, Acts 17:28), who is the Maker of heaven and earth. Humanity has been given a cultural mandate to take care of the created order (Genesis 2:15), and this includes culture. Culture, says Rah, "consists of shared socially learned knowledge and patterns of behavior."[15] Humankind has been given dominion over creation and culture (Genesis 1:26-28, Psalm 8:6, Genesis 9:1); therefore, culture is dynamic, is something human beings both generate and change—e.g., Christians are charged with reconciling cultural elements to God (Colossians 3:23-24). As Niebuhr has discussed, human beings need to recognize that they can co-create with God in the transformation of culture.[16] Yancey notes that the "static notion of culture needs to be challenged . . . all cultures are constantly changing

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[15]Soong-Chan Rah, "A Theology of Culture," *Cultural Intelligence for a Changing Church* (Regent College, 2013), compact disc.

[16]Richard Niebuhr, "Theological Convictions," in *Christ and Culture* (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, reprint 1996), 194-196. From an anthropological perspective of culture, both theology and culture are things that humans produce, and they only do it well if God is their ultimate point of reference. Kathryn Tanner, "The Nature and Tasks of Theology," in *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997), 63-65.

over time and will change . . . from exposure to other cultures."[17] Christians are reminded that stewardship includes culture (Matthew 25:14-30) because culture ultimately belongs to God (Psalm 24:1). Certainly, "The only way to change culture is to create more of it," says Crouch.[18] Because humanity is given both the *imago Dei* and the common grace to make culture, there can be much of culture which is good, Kersten concludes.[19]

However, all "cultures . . . are an expression by fallen humanity [in the] attempt to reflect God's image through the process of creativity."[20] Therefore, Scripture warns

Christians not "to conform to this present age" (Romans 12:2) and to be cautious of "the deception of the world's wisdom (1Corinthians 3:18-19)."[21] Thus, when Christians witness power groups blocking cultural diversity, they should recognize it as a symptom of human depravity. "The gospel destigmatizes and deabsolutizes every culture; no culture can claim it is the full expression of the gospel;" furthermore, Christians should recognize that the "gospel can only advance by being able to take root in every culture."[22] Sugikawa and Wong aptly state that, "When Christ is 'born' into each society, his presence may oppose, replace, complete, or fulfill various aspects of society's culture."[23] The New Testament shows many subcultures transformed by the gospel. The Great Commission has profound implications for the cultural mandate in terms of how the Good News enters into different cultures (Matthew 28:18-20). Only God's people can fulfill this salvific aspect of the cultural directive. Although there is no culture-free expression of the gospel, Christians

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[17]George Yancey, *One Body, One Spirit: Principles of Successful Multiracial Churches* (Downer Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 39.

[18]Andy Crouch, *Culture Making: Recovering our Creative Calling* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 67.

[19]G.H. Kersten, *Reformed Dogmatics,* vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1981), 78. Common grace is given to humanity in all cultural dimensions of life that require gifts and abilities with the accompanying virtues, graces, wisdom, understanding, capacities, and ethical exercise (78). Common grace is a reflection of God's love, mercy, and preservation (75).

[20]Soong-Cha Rah, "What Is Culture?," in *Many Colors: Cultural Intelligence for a Changing Church* (Chicago IL: Moody Publishers, 2010), 29.

[21]Doug Heidebrecht, "Culture Clash: What Do We Mean by 'Culture'?," *MB Herald* 46, no. 9 (September 2007): 9.

[22]Bob Paul, "Leadership Integrity," (class lecture, DMPM 922 Leadership Theory, Theology, and Practice, Carey Theological College, Vancouver, BC, January 18, 2013).

[23]Nancy Sugikawa and Steve Wong, "Grace-Filled Households," in *Growing Healthy Asian American Churches,* ed. Peter Cha. Steve Kang, and Helen Lee (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2006), 32.

are called to be an alternative culture that gives witness to the Good News.[24] Rah expressively states, "Our goal [is] to seek ways to honor the presence of God in different cultures."[25] Based on Revelation 7:9, which refers to cultures and languages, and Revelation 15:2-3, which refers to cultural forms, the knowledge that Christ's lordship includes everything plus the understanding that everything will be renewed (Romans 8:19-21) should mean that some human culture-making will have eternal significance.

Theology for Cultural Inclusiveness and Diversity

Rah has made the case that a cultural framework (e.g., Western, Eastern, Confucian) can hold the church captive to a cultural worldview.[26] There are a number of themes in the Scriptures that invite the church to embrace diversity. Genesis 1 repeats five times God's pleasure in diversity. Mention of the various nations in Genesis 10 further reinforces God's acknowledgment of ethnic multiplicity. In Genesis 12:2-3, God tells Abram that he plans to bless all the peoples of the earth through him. Thus, if a people are redeemed, the cultures they create can be too. The obvious conclusion is that God intended the human family to become multiethnic and multicultural. A divine affirmation of dispersion is reinforced by the scattering after the flood (see Genesis 7) and after the tower of Babel incident (see Genesis 11). Sheffield suggests this scattering was meant as a gift.[27] Cultural multiplicity is the ramification of Genesis 1:28 and 9:1, where humankind is told to "be fruitful and increase . . . fill the earth."

Throughout the Old Testament, there are texts that refer to the people of God coming from many cultural backgrounds (Genesis 14:18, Exodus 3:1, 12:48-49). In the New Testament, people from every cultural background are invited into the Good News. In the book of Acts, the trajectory of outreach is towards the nations. Since "from one man [God] made all the nations" (Acts 17:26), God is therefore the

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[24]Darrell L. Guder, ed., *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1998), 87, 119.

[25]Rah, "What Is Culture?," in *Many Colors,* 29. Rah says that Cultural Intelligence is about being hospitable to different cultures and cultural expressions and developing a biblical view, rather than a socially derived view of culture (195).

[26]Soong-Chan Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism: Freeing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 207.

[27]Dan Sheffield, "Biblical Reflection on Cultural Diversity," in *The Multicultural Leader: Developing a Catholic Personality* (Toronto, ON: Clements Publishing, 2005), 28.

ultimate source of the potential for cultural diversity. In declaring that the gift of salvation is extended to "everyone who calls on the name of the Lord (Acts 2:21)," no matter what culture they may have come from ("for all who are far off," Acts 2:39), God is presenting an inclusive, multiethnic, multicultural, and multiracial template for the church. Further, the church is reminded of the call to embrace unity in diversity (Galatians 3:28, Ephesians 4:3-6), with Christians called to love their neighbors (Matthew 5:44), their enemies (Matthew 5:46-48), and those different in the body of Christ (John 13:35).[28] There is nothing the matter with wanting to preserve culture (it's a matter of free choice), but to use that as an excuse to hinder other subcultures from doing culturally relevant mission is an act of suppression.

The reason for addressing cultural inclusivity is that many Chinese churches have not come to terms with how to keep the unity of the faith despite cultural diversity. Paul makes a call for unity and maturity in the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:1-6) and for Christians to "build others up according to their needs" (Ephesians 4:29). It is wrong to confuse unity with uniformity in the body of Christ (Romans12:4, 1 Corinthians 12:13, Ephesians 4:1-4). Creation shows that the Creator did not make everything the same—there is great variety. Scripture also advocates for cultural diversity (Ezekiel 47:22, Galatians 3:28, Colossians 3:11, Isaiah 56:6-8). Therefore, trying to preserve cultural uniformity in the church misses the point that the church in all its cultural diversity finds its identity in Christ. Simply put, "A biblically grounded theology of cultural diversity does not simply inspire us to affirm our differences . . . but also to . . . seek out truly reconciled relationships."[29] Lee offers an "Asian American theology in the context of marginality [as] an invitation . . . to meet as fellow strangers and to stand by each other in solidarity as we join in God's own joyous struggles to build the household of God where [others] can come and be at home."[30]

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[28]David K. Clark, "Theology in Cultural Context," in *To Know and Love God: Method for Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2003), 126-128.

[29]Ibid., 131.

[30]Sang Hyun Lee, "Pilgrimage and Home in the Wilderness of Marginality: Symbols and Context in Asian American Theology," in *New Spiritual Homes: Religion and Asian Americans,* edited by David K. Yoo (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1999), 228.

Theology for Identity

I agree with Wing So that, "The quest of identity . . . is also a theological problem."[31]   Certainly, every wave of new Chinese immigrants has helped reinforce the retention of Chinese culture and kept Chinese communities negotiating identities between two worlds.[32] Ng has noted that historically many first-generation Chinese in the immigrant community have taken a dim view of local-born Chinese (LBC) assimilating into the Canadian/Western culture.[33]   One first-generation Chinese labeled the acculturation of Canadian-born Chinese (CBC) as a problem of "the local born, who should be ashamed of their cultural corruption and deficiency."[34]   On the other hand, in 1964, a CBC minister "reflected on the fallacy of assimilation and the merits of integration" as being more able to fully "participate . . . as Canadian citizens."[35]   Furthermore, "Embracing a Canadian identity should not entail the loss of one's ethnic culture."[36]

The statements by these two men demonstrate the competing views in Chinese culture of what it means to be Chinese-Canadian and what it might mean to be a Chinese Canadian Christian. Neither view makes it imperative that one cease to be Chinese or embrace Chinese culture. Wang notes that because CBC is a hybrid culture,[37] "The coexistence of Chinese and western (Canadian) identities in the church brings tensions and conflict into this community."[38]   My impression is that

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[31]Wing Y. So, "Identity and Identification," in *A Winning Combination: ABC/OBC: Understanding the Cultural Tensions in Chinese Churches,* ed. Cecelia Yau *(* Petaluma, CA: Chinese Christian Mission, 1986)*,* 35. This quest asks questions such as, "Why am I here?" and "What is the ultimate reference point of my life?"

[32]Wing Chung Ng, "Negotiating Identities between Two Worlds, 1945-1970," in *The Chinese in Vancouver, 1945-80: The Pursuit of Identity and Power (* Vancouver, BC: UBC Press, 1999), 88.

[33] Ibid., 89.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid., 105.

[36] Ibid.

[37]Paul C. Wang, "A Study on Cross-Cultural Conflict Patterns and Intervention Between Two Generations of Leaders in Two Chinese Churches in Vancouver: Toward a Vibrant Intergenerational Partnership in Ministry,"   DMin dissertation, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (Deerfield, IL, 2003), 6-7.

[38]Ibid., 140. Wang believes that the coexistence of "interlocking identities of Chinese culture, Canadian values, and Christian beliefs induce tensions and conflict" (32). Wang's belief is that CBCs are "a generation in search of its identity" (143). Yang comments that these tensions and conflicts become manifest where "immigrants want [LBCs] to show deference and obedience whereas [LBCs] want more independence and

some overseas-born Chinese (OBC)[39] see the movement towards acculturation as a CBC identity problem. In other words, some OBCs preach a purer form of Chinese culture, seeing the cultural drift as a CBC problem and feel that OBCs have an obligation to pull CBCs back to the cultural center.

It should be obvious that a bicultural identity is different from either a Canadian or a Chinese culture; and it is true that, in the history of English ministries, many have had "a difficult time finding a sense of significance, identity, and belonging within the church."[40] However, from a theological point of view, the Christian's identity is given by Christ, not culture (1 Corinthians 15:10, 2 Corinthians 5:17). People need to recognize theologically that God did not make a mistake in their faith development or their ethnic identity formation. The canon defines the people of God as members of Christ's body (Ephesians 4:15-16). The true lineage of faith, according to Romans 4:16-17, is that the descendents of Abraham are those who live by faith. Christians are God's community (John 1:12, Romans 8:14-16), and being "baptized into the body of Christ" (1 Corinthians 12:27) brings people into this new covenant family of God (Galatians 6:10, Romans 11:27). This covenant family of God sets the framework for Christians' identity. The family of God exists to worship God, to be "a house of prayer for all nations" (Mark 11:17), to nurture the intercultural faith family, and to carry out Christ's mission.[41] For these purposes, all the boundaries of ethnic cultural identity are dissolved in Christ. The Cross is the reconciliation point for all nations (Ephesians 2:11-22). Believers are called to pursue peace in light of the reality of the new family of God (Romans 14:19, Hebrews 12:14-17). As part of God's family, Christians are recruited to carry out his mission and purpose (John 20:21)—"The church's essence is missional for the calling and sending action of God forms [Christians'] identity."[42] Christians share a unity, a common identity that is Christocentric and surpasses all

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respect." Fenggang Yang, *Chinese Christians in America: Conversion, Assimilation, and Adhesie Identities* (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 1999)*,* 178.

[39] From this point forward the acronym OBC means Overseas Born Chinese.

[40]Wayne Wong, "The Current Challenges of Doing Inter-Generational Chinese Ministries in Greater Vancouver: A Reconciliation Ministry," Master's thesis, Northwest Baptist Seminary (Vancouver, BC, 1998), 8.

[41]Grudem, "The Nature and Purposes of the Church," in *Systematic Theology,* 867.

[42]Guder, 82.

cultural conventions.   This common identity is anchored "in the theological claim unity is [a reflection of the] Trinitarian God."[43]

Theology for Passing the Leadership Baton
On to the Next Generation of Adults

Some OBC leaders in Chinese churches are suspicious that an acculturating English ministry is a subtle rejection of Chinese identity and culture and possibly a rejection of Christian orthodoxy.   In fact, many adult second-generation Chinese "find that . . .   Christianity reinforces 'Asian' values of family, work, and education;" in some ways, "Confucian ideals . . . [are treated] similar to Christian ideals."[44]

Back in the 1980s, Ling commented that, "The baton belongs to the future leaders."[45] English ministries in Chinese bicultural churches have come of age and that future is here now.   It is time for an expanded model for English ministries.   The scriptures provide various examples of the leadership baton being passed on to the next generation. Some of these narratives are messy, and others are intentional and seamless. Moses mentored and commissioned Joshua (Numbers 27:18-23, Joshua 1:1-18); David prepared Solomon (1 Chronicles 28:1-21); Elijah mentored Elisha (1 Kings 19:19-21); Jesus trained and commissioned the disciples to disciple other leaders (Matthew 28:18-20); Barnabas advocated for Paul's leadership (Acts 9:27-29); and Paul cultivated leadership in bicultural Timothy and encouraged him to also pass the leadership baton (2 Timothy 2:2).

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[43]M. Sydney Park, "Theology of the Household of God: Identity and Function of Christ's Body in Ephesians," in *Honoring the Generations*, 9.

[44]Rudy V. Busto, "The Gospel According to the Model Minority? Hazarding an Interpretation of Asian American Evangelical College Students," in *New Spiritual Homes: Religion and Asian Americans,* ed. David K. Yoo (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 1999), 177. Jeung discusses various Confucian virtues, such as family unity, education, a work ethic, a sense of responsibility, duty, and obligation that get adapted into the Western Christian context; Russell Jeung, *Faithful Generations: Race and New Asian American Churches* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005)*,* 33-35. Ruokanen and Huang note that Chinese Christians repeatedly find themselves interfacing Confucianism with a Christian identity; some believe there is little conflict between Christianity and Chinese Confucianism due to the fact that "Confucian thought has a definite religious dimension;" Miikka Ruokanen and Paulos Huang, eds., *Christianity and Chinese Culture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2010), 81ff., 215, 279, 101, 107.

[45]Samuel Ling, "The Chinese Way of Doing Things: Contours of OBC-ABC Cultural Differences," in *A Winning Combination: ABC/OBC: Understanding the Cultural Tensions in Chinese Churches,* ed. Cecelia Yau (Petaluma, CA: Chinese Christian Mission, 1986), 58.

The discerning of such transitions needs to be immersed in prayer (Matthew 6:10) and focus on a calling-based leadership. Given scripture, the literature review, and the survey results in this study, I am advocating the retention of English-speaking adults from Canadian-Chinese churches through associated parallel independent English congregational models. These models will require a passing of the leadership baton and empowering English ministry leaders to authentically leverage mission.

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