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In Church as it is in Heaven: An Argument for Regenerate and Ethnically Diverse Local Church Membership

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Introduction

"Our ecclesiological convictions set Baptists apart from most other evangelical groups."[1] I met Jesus in the context of the broadly non-denominational evangelical tradition, but have since become a confessional Baptist by conviction. I have also spent the last eight years serving as a majority (Anglo) pastor in a largely minority neighborhood and church community. One impetus behind this paper, then, is working to sketch the contours of how to be faithfully Baptist in a multiethnic context. But more broadly, beyond the confines of contextual factors, this paper works toward a proposal for how Baptist ecclesiology can uniquely position Baptists to cultivate reconciled diversity in healthy multiethnic local churches. This will take confessional, theological labor. "Sociologists have led the way in researching multiethnic congregations. It would be profitable for more theologians to pursue this area of examination."[2] This paper modestly attempts a way toward a biblical and theological proposal that shows the inextricable link between different facets of God's heart for his church. The formal proposal of this paper is this: a healthy local church, as a proleptic expression of the eschatological church, should have membership that is regenerate and ethnically diverse.

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[1] Nathan A. Finn, "Contours of a Healthy Baptist Spirituality," *Criswell Theological Review* 12:1 (2014): 16.

[2] Stephen Crouse, "A Missiological Evaluation of Southern Baptist Churches in the United States" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014), 240.

This proposal outlines this way: First, this paper will argue that the local church is a proleptic expression of the eschatological church. Second, this proleptic character implies that the local church's membership should mirror the eschatological church's membership in two specific ways: the membership of a local church should be regenerate and ethnically diverse. Third, this regenerate, ethnically diverse membership is required for the local church's well-being. Fourth, shortcomings in a church's health in these two areas exist as a function of ongoing congregational sanctification in between the inauguration and consummation of the kingdom.

The Proleptic Nature of the Local Church

The section will propose a way of viewing the relationship between the local and the "not-local" church, arguing that an individual local church is a proleptic sign of the eschatological church. This thesis builds upon Miroslav Volf's discussion in *After Our Likeness*.[3] Volf sees "proleptic/prolepsis" as bound up with "anticipation"[4] and "hope," but also "present experience."[5] It is "real anticipation," of something that is both present ("real") and future ("anticipation").[6] To paraphrase with the words of another theologian, "prolepsis" is "the hope of a future which has already started."[7]

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[3] Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 127-158. This work has engendered mixed reviews among evangelicals. Negatively, Kevin J. Bidwell, *The Church as the Image of the Trinity: A Critical Evaluation of Miroslav Volf's Ecclesial Model* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2011) and William M. Schweitzer, "The Church as the Image of the Trinity: A Critical Evaluation of Miroslav Volf's Ecclesial Model," *The Westminster Theological Journal* 74:1 (2012): 209-21. More positively, David Peterson, "After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity," *Themelios* 24:3 (1999): 90-92. Peterson says, "Exploring first the question of ecclesiality (what makes the church the church), Volf rightly insists that eschatology is the key" (91).

[4] Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 140.

[5] Ibid., 129.

[6] Ibid., 140.

[7] Paul Leer-Salvesen, "Reconciliation Without Violence," *Studia Theologica* 63:2 (2009): 175.

In Volf's current discussion, this object of present experience and future hope is the church, which he defines not simply as local or universal, but as eschatological. Volf argues from Matthew 18:20, "Wherever two or three are gathered in my name," that "assembly" is the constituent element of a church. Volf unfolds this understanding of the church as "an assembly" by explaining that the church "is the *people* who in a specific way assemble at a specific place" in the name of Jesus.[8] In a most fundamental way, "A congregation *is* the body of Christ in the particular locale in which it gathers together."[9]

This concrete local expression does not, however, exhaust the reality of the church. While the universal church "includes all Christians who have lived and are living,"[10] Volf argues that the conceptions of the church both as local and universal should be seen "within the larger context of the entire eschatological people of God."[11] "For both exegetical

[8] Ibid., 137. "The church is first of all an *assembly*; 'where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them" (137, emphasis original). Cf. John Webster: "church assembles around the revelatory self-presence of God in Christ through the Spirit, borne to the communion of saints by the writings of the prophets and apostles" ("On Evangelical Ecclesiology," *Ecclesiology* 1:1 [2004]: 32).

[9] Volf, 138.

[10] Ibid., 140.

[11] Ibid., 141, n. 55. Similarly, the Reformed understanding of the church invisible, defined by Edmund P. Clowney as "all the saints known to God, past, present, and future" (*The Church* [Downer's Grove: InterVarsity, 1995], 109). Cf. Mark Dever, "We can also speak of the *invisible* church, that is, the church as God sees it, or as it will appear on the last day" (*The Church: The Gospel Made Visible* [Nashville, TN: B&H, 2012], 92). Wellum notes that "even though there is only one people of God throughout the ages, there is a redemptive historical difference between OT Israel and the NT church" (Stephen J. Wellum, "Baptism and the Relationship Between the Covenants" in *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ* [Nashville: B&H Academic, 2006], 113). Küng, while not denying the invisible church, emphasizes its visibility, saying, "There has never been such a thing as a completely invisible church [....] A church made up of real people cannot possibly be invisible" (*The Church* [Translated by Ray and Rosaleen Ockenden. New York: Sneed and Ward, 1967], 35). Cf. John Webster: "The church is visible in the sense that it is a genuine creaturely event and assembly, not a purely eschatological polity or culture" ("On Evangelical Ecclesiology," 25).

and theological reasons," Volf explains that ecclesiology requires a broader category: "the eschatological people of God assembling themselves from all the nations at particular places."[12]

This assertion raises the question of the relationship between these two expressions: local and eschatological. Here Volf introduces "the category of *anticipation*."[13] The local church and the universal church "do overlap insofar as the universal church includes all local churches, and every local church is a part of the universal church."[14] And both "through their common relation to the Spirit of Christ" are made "into the anticipation of the eschatological gathering of the people of God."[15]

Volf undergirds this point by arguing that the church is not a collective "one" but "a differentiated unity," individuals interconnected in "a communion" that exists by virtue of the indwelling Spirit and a common confession.[16] The same Christ, then, who by his Spirit interconnects individuals within a church also interconnects individual churches with one another.[17] And "Christ," then, "who is present in the local church through his Spirit [...] in this way makes it into the church in a proleptic experience of the eschatological gathering of the people of God."[18]

Volf's thesis would seem to be confirmed textually: "But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven" (Hebrews 12:22-

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[12] Ibid., 139-140.

[13] Ibid., 140. Küng sees the anticipatory nature of the church as pointing toward "the definitive reign of God" (96).

[14] Volf, 140.

[15] Ibid., 141. "The church...is nothing apart from its function as an eschatological community and therefore as an anticipatory sign of God's coming rule" (Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology, volume 3*. Translated by Geoffrey Bromley [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998], 32; quoted in Ted Peters, "In Memoriam: Wolfhart Pannenberg (1928-2014)," *Dialog: A Journal Of Theology* 53:4 (2014): 365-83.

[16] Volf, 145-154.

[17] Ibid., 145.

[18] Ibid., 145.

23).[19] Meaning, when the Christian assembly assembles on earth it somehow steps into the reality of the heavenly assembly. William Lane confirms that these verses from Hebrews refer to the redeemed heavenly assembly.[20] Lane argues that "the assembly in view [...] is an eschatological or heavenly gathering."[21] James W. Thompson says, "Although the inheritance of the heavenly city lies in the future [...], the community is already the participant in worship that spans heaven and earth."[22]

This returns us to Volf's earlier assertion, "A congregation *is* the body of Christ in the particular locale in which it gathers together."[23] This means that prolepsis does not reduce the local church to a community of future hope alone, but envisions the local church as the actual future itself assembled in the present. To this point, Volf defines the local

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[19] Biblical citations are taken from the *English Standard Version* unless otherwise indicated.

[20] William L. Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*. Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 47B (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1991), 468. Luke Timothy Johnson, *Hebrews: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2012), says that "the Mount Zion spoken of here is not the seat of temporal rule over Israel, but of God's eschatological rule through Christ" (331). Cf. Craig R. Koester, "Hebrews, Rhetoric, and the Future" in Eric Farrel Mason and Kevin B. McCruden, *Reading the Epistle to the Hebrews: A Resource for Students* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 113.

[21] Lane, *Hebrews 9-13*, 469. Cf. "Believers are, in the present, entering and receiving eschatological realities, the continuing reception of which will surely result in the final, full realization of those realities" (Alexander Stewart, "Cosmology, Eschatology, and Soteriology in Hebrews: A Synthetic Analysis," *Bulletin For Biblical Research* 20:4 [2010]: 554).

[22] James W. Thompson, "The Ecclesiology of Hebrews," *Restoration Quarterly* 56:3 (2014): 145; Patrick Graham Willis, "Multi-site Churches and Their Undergirding Ecclesiology: Questioning Its Baptist Identity and Biblical Validity" (PhD Diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014), says "as believers were being added into the eschatological church (e.g. Acts 2:41-47) via salvation and into the local church via baptism they were concurrently partaking of membership in the eschatological church and the local church" (191).

[23] Volf, 138. "The local church does not merely *belong* to the church, the local church *is* the church. The whole church can only be understood in terms of the local church and its concrete actions" (Küng, 85).

church as "a proleptic *experience* of the eschatological gathering."[24] And again, "Participation in the communion of the triune God, however, is not only an object of hope for the church, but also its present experience."[25] This steers Volf's thesis away from the danger of what Michael Horton calls eschatological "reductionism." Horton, in critiquing anticipatory eschatology as seen in Moltmann and Pannenberg, provides a reminder that prolepsis narrowly defined does not exhaust the New Testament eschatological vision: "In contrast to all reductionism, Pauline eschatology insists that the new age actually *arrives* in Christ as 'the firstfruits.'"[26] Thus, the local church is a real manifestation of the eschatological community. It *is* the eschatological community, not "*merely*" an anticipatory assembly, but a genuine "foretaste" of "the eschatological gathering."[27]

On this point, P.T. O'Brien concedes that the exact nature of "the relationship between the local church and the heavenly gathering [....] is

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[24] Volf, 145, emphasis added.

[25] Ibid., 129.

[26] Michael Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 37. In this work, Horton effectively exposes the shortcomings of the "merely" proleptic and anticipatory eschatological visions of Pannenberg and Moltmann: "It is clear in Paul's writings that the 'new' that has come is not merely anticipatory or revelatory, but effective" (38). Cf. Jürgen Moltmann, "Anticipations are always a preliminary taking possession of what is to come for other people and other things" (*The Church in the Power of the Spirit.* Translated by Margaret Kohl. [New York: Harper and Row, 1977], 195). John W. Cooper explicates the panentheistic visions of Moltmann (explicitly) and Pannenberg (implicitly), in which the Trinity itself is ontologically incomplete until the union of God, his people, and creation in the eschaton. (*Panentheism: The Other God of the Philosophers: From Plato to the Present* [Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006], 237-281). Likewise, "Viewing the resurrection as proleptic event, Pannenberg underscores the ontological priority of the future," ([R. David Rightmire, "Pannenberg's Quest for the Proleptic Jesus," *The Asbury Theological Journal* 44:1 [1989]: 64). The shortcomings of this approach are ably countered by Horton.

[27] Volf, 156-157. This would seem to invalidate the critique of Avery Robert Dulles of "such an anticipatory ecclesiology" as insufficient ("After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity," *First Things* 87 [1998]: 52).

nowhere specifically spelled out."[28] That said, O'Brien argues, "Perhaps it is best to suggest that the local congregations or house-groups are earthly manifestations of the heavenly assembly."[29] The local assembly "manifests" or "shows" the heavenly assembly, what Edmund Clowney calls, "the Lord's true assembly."[30] The heavenly assembly fully exists eschatologically, and the space-and-time-bound local assembly expresses and signals this eschatological heavenly reality in the constraints of space and time. As Mark Dever says, "The picture of people assembling in one place for worship points the world to this marvelous end-of-history congregation."[31]

Gregg Allison's appropriation of Michael Horton for his discussion on church discipline would seem to support such a thesis on prolepsis.[32] Allison, referencing Horton, refers to church discipline being "a proleptic and declarative sign of eschatological judgment."[33] Consistency would seem to indicate that if the actions of the local assembly function proleptically so should the assembling of that assembly itself function proleptically. Both in its doing and in its being a local church anticipates an eschatological reality.

If this is true, what is the shape of the local church's anticipation of the eschatological assembly? What does it look like? This question requires an answer to a prior question: what is the character of the eschatological assembly? Once this character is established, the character of the faithful local church can be defined and pursued more fully. This

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[28] P.T. O'Brien, "The Church as a Heavenly and Eschatological Entity" in D.A. Carson, ed. *The Church in the Bible and the World* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002), 97. Recent controversy notwithstanding, O'Brien remains a helpful voice in this discussion. So also Küng: "the relationship between the local churches and the whole church is not laid down, either theologically or juridically, in the New Testament" (85).

[29] O'Brien, "The Church as a Heavenly and Eschatological Entity," 97.

[30] Clowney, *The Church*, 32.

[31] Dever, *The Church*, 134. "Since Christ is *entirely* present in every congregation of worship, every congregation of worship held by the local community is in the fullest sense God's ecclesia, Christ's body" (Küng, 235).

[32] Gregg Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers: The Doctrine of the Church* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 181.

[33] Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 181. Here he cites Horton, *Covenant and Eschatology*, 272.

will enable the local church to practice greater eschatological fidelity in its worship and witness, as it more fully embraces the reality that already defines it.

Perhaps the ancient credo best summarizes the biblical witness to the eschatological gathering's character. The eschatological assembly is one, holy, catholic, and apostolic. The dramatic scene of the heavenly assembly envisioned by John the Revelator shows this: "a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes" (Rev 7:9).[34]

The assembly here is one, united, "a great multitude," singular; not many fractionalized tribes, but one made up of many, diversity defined by unity and unity defined by diversity. The assembly here is holy, "clothed in white robes."[35] Here is a vision of an assembly altogether pure, redeemed, by and before the Lamb who is centered in the breeze of the many waving branches of palm. The assembly here is catholic, universal, the pan-ethnocultural people promised to Abraham.[36] The assembly here is apostolic, for how would this vision be known without the testimony of the apostle?

What, then, will characterize the local church's faithful proleptic expression of and witness to the character of the eschatological assembly? The Reformation *sine qua non* marks of the church, gospel-preaching and rightly ordered ordinances, function as a witness to Christ

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[34] Cf. Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 316-20; Robert H. Mounce, *The Book of Revelation*, rev. ed. New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 162; Leon Morris, *Revelation*. Tyndale New Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 115; Brian K. Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Publishing Corporation, 2009), 150. Gordon D. Fee, *Revelation: A New Covenant Commentary* (Cambridge, UK: The Lutterworth Press, 2013), 111.

[35] "That they are white probably points us to justification. The saved stand before God perfect in the righteousness which Christ supplies" (Morris, *Revelation,* 115).

[36] "Earlier John declares that the Lamb is worthy because he redeemed (i.e., liberated) every tribe, tongue, people, and nation (5:9). Though John orders the elements differently in 7:9, he clearly has the same universal, believing congregation in mind" (Blount, *Revelation,* 150).

until the consummation of the kingdom and gathering of the nations. These are the activities that define the local church's being until Christ returns. What, however, should define the constituent identity of the local church's intention to gather together as a church in light of its proleptic nature? Next I will argue that the character of the eschatological assembly is best expressed in a local church composed of regenerate and ethnically diverse members.

Regenerate Church Membership

Membership as an idea is implied in the nature of the eschatological assembly itself. The Apostle describes it hyperbolically as an innumerable multitude, appearing infinite, a much greater number than the 144,000 just mentioned in Revelation 7:8.[37] Though so obvious as to be tautological, the very existence of such a multitude implies the existence of members of that multitude. Without members, without constituent individuals, the multitude does not exist. And at some point, despite the prophetic hyperbole of "innumerable," the multitude exists as a countable gathering of those constituent individuals. Therefore, local church membership itself is implied by the nature of the eschatological gathering.[38]

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[37] Osborne, *Revelation*, 318; Fee, *Revelation*, 111.

[38] On further arguments for membership *per se*, cf. John Mark Yeats, "More Than Fifteen Million Southern Baptists? Recovering Regenerate Church Membership," in Jason K. Allen, ed. *The SBC in the 21st Century: Reflection, Renewal, and Recommitment* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 96-98; Jeremy M. Kimble, "'That His Spirit May Be Saved': Church Discipline as a Means to Repentance and Perseverance" (PhD Diss. Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2013), 184-187; Willis, "Multi-site Churches and Their Undergirding Ecclesiology," 182-188. Yeats says, "While true that *membership* as a formal term is not found in the text, the concept is clearly presented and used from the earliest inception of the church (96); also Willis says membership "does not arise from a single proof-text, but is ascertained from a systematic investigation of the corporate nature of the new covenant" (184). It is interesting that Volf himself argues, "The boundary between those who belong to the church and those who do not belong should not be drawn too sharply" (Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 148, n. 84). Better on this point is Yeats: "Christianity clearly functions as a bounded set with thresholds of entry centered on living according to the lordship of Jesus Christ" (99).

Moreover, the nature of the eschatological assembly would seem to demand that the membership of the church not only be constituted as membership, but as a regenerate membership.[39] Only those in Christ should constitute the membership of the local congregation, because only those in Christ constitute the membership of the eschatological congregation. The vision of the multitude in Revelation 7 clearly demonstrates this point. "These are the ones who have come out of the great tribulation" (7:14); this, however, does not exclude the rest of the people of God. "The larger context favors a point in time when the complete number of the redeemed stand before God."[40] Those who "have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (7:14) compose this multitude. This is a specific number of specific individuals: those who have been washed and regenerated.[41] The faith-full, the believers. The eschatological assembly is a believing, *having been* (previously) regenerated assembly. And so should the local assembly be.

This ideal of a regenerate local assembly, "regenerate church membership," has been championed by Baptists and rightly called "the Baptist mark of the church."[42] A fundamental component of this position

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[39] Cf. Russell D. Moore, *The Kingdom of Christ: The New Evangelical Perspective* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2004), 139-140.

[40] Mounce, *Revelation*, 164. Cf. Morris argues that most likely "the throng comprises all the saved and not simply the martyrs or some other group" (*Revelation*, 117).

[41] "The complete efficacy of Christ's atoning death is being strongly asserted" (Morris, 117).

[42] John Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches: A Contemporary Ecclesiology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005), 81. Cf. James Leo Garrett Jr., "Seeking a Regenerate Church Membership," *Southwestern Journal Of Theology* 3:2 (1961): 25-36; Tom Nettles, *The Baptists: Key People Involved in Forming a Baptist Identity*, vol. 1 (Ross-shire: Scotland, 2005), 14; H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 1987), 75-76; Robert G. Torbet, *A History of the Baptists*, 3rd ed. (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1963), 17; Greg Wills, "The Church: Baptists and Their Churches in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries" in Mark E. Dever, ed. *Polity: Biblical Arguments on How to Conduct Church Life* (Washington D.C.: Nine Marks Ministries, 2001), 17. Mark Medley notes, "Baptists will praise Volf for arguing that the local church alone is the church in the strictly theological sense and is not subordinate to any other ecclesial authority" ("After Our

is the assumed proleptic nature of the local assembly as an anticipatory expression of the nature of the eschatological assembly. For example, John Hammett argues, "Simply as a matter of logic, if the universal church is composed of all believers, it seems that the goal of local churches should be to come as close to that standard as possible."[43] Similarly a recent volume calling Baptists back to this ideal of regenerate membership is titled by this eschatological connection: *On Earth as It Is in Heaven: Reclaiming Regenerate Church Membership.*[44] This book calls the local church to "seek with all the integrity it can muster to be an accurate reflection of the coming church universal, the eschatological church."[45]

Thus the local church which lives and moves, exists and acts, with the most comprehensive eschatological fidelity will constitute itself as a believers' church. It will institute a definite boundary of membership and the constituent individuals of its membership will be those who have bathed in the blood of Jesus.[46] Thus, this one key aspect of baptistic ecclesiology is a direct implication of the proleptic nature of the local church. Next, we will explore a second direct implication: the same local congregation that constitutes itself narrowly of regenerate members will likewise constitute itself broadly of ethnically diverse regenerate members.

Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity," *Review & Expositor* 96:2 [1999]: 311).

[43] Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches*, 83.

[44] Wyman Lewis Richardson, *On Earth as It Is in Heaven: Reclaiming Regenerate Church Membership* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders' Press, 2011). The present paper, titled after my own theological vision, plays on this prayer, "In church as it is in heaven."

[45] Richardson, *On Earth As It Is in Heaven*, 5.

[46] "We need to seek a recovery of Baptist principles. On regenerate church membership, for instance, there has been too much compromise. Baptist ecclesiology is not merely a matter of church organization. It stands at the very center of the Baptist vision and goes to the very heart of our theology" (R. Albert Mohler, Jr. "Baptist Identity: Is There a Future?" *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 9:1 [2005]: 8).

Ethnic Diversity

This section will argue that a proleptic and eschatological local church ecclesiology implies not only the normative purity of regenerate membership but also a normative diversity of ethnically differing members.[47] In other words, a local church, as an anticipatory sign of the eschatological congregation, should be (not simply may be) diverse across boundaries of ethnicity.[48]

Briefly, some terms must be defined. First, "race" is now usually understood as "a concept primarily concerned with biology."[49] Second, "culture" can be defined as the values and artifacts produced by a specific population.[50] Third, these two ideas cohere in the idea of "ethnicity." Hutchison and Smith note the uncertainty surrounding the term "ethnicity," which is derived from the Greek ἔθνος.[51] They note the conflation of both "cultural community" and a "sense of ancestry and nativity" associated with the idea.[52] Denise Kimber Buell notes that "the

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[47] Scot McKnight says that "God has designed the church—and this is the heart of Paul's mission—to be *a fellowship of difference and differents*" (*A Fellowship of Differents* [Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2014], 20, emphasis original). He uses the metaphor of "a salad bowl" (18) to describe the ethnicity that should typify the local church.

[48] Contra Richard Willson Hardison, "A Theological Critique of the Multiethnic Church Movement: 2000-2013" (PhD diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014). Hardison argues that the relationship between the heavenly and early church represents "a point of discontinuity" and that local churches are not required to imitate the ethnic diversity of the heavenly assembly (143-146).

[49] Elizabeth Tonkin, Maryon McDonald, Malcom Chapman, "History and Ethnicity," in John Hutchison and Anthony D. Smith, ed. *Ethnicity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 21. Cf. Dewi Hughes, "Following Jesus as His Community in the Broken World of Ethnic Identity," *Evangelical Review Of Theology* 31:4 (2007): 331-341.

[50] James Davison Hunter, *To Change the World: The Irony, Tragedy, and Possibility of Christianity in the Late Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 29.

[51] John Hutchison and Anthony D. Smith, eds. *Ethnicity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 4.

[52] Ibid., 5.

majority opinion about ethnicity" includes "claims of common kinship."[53] But also, "most definitions [...] acknowledge that other factors (language, place, religion, foodways) may be claimed by a given community as more central than kinship or descent."[54] Thus, "ethnicity" exists at the intersection of biological and sociological and cultural identity.[55] Moreover, closely connected would be the idea of socio-economic status or "class."[56]

This understanding of ethnicity as occupying the conjunction of race and culture makes the term "multiethnic" as opposed to "multiracial" or "multicultural" preferable when discussing congregational diversity.[57] Likewise, as Mark DeYmaz and Harry Li note, this term more precisely retains the biblical imperative, μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη.[58] In 2000, the watershed publication of *Divided by Faith* catalyzed the conversation

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[53] Denise Kimber Buell, *Why This New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 9.

[54] Buell, *Why This New Race*, 9.

[55] I was first introduced to ethnicity as this intersection in a talk by Steven Tamayo. (Steven Tamayo, "Biracial" [video of lecture], The Gospel and Race Conference, January 18, 2014, https://youtu.be/GueAVyv-PwE). Cf. J. Daniel Hays, *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race* (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity, 2003), 23.

[56] For the purposes of the discussion below, diverse constituencies of socio-economic status will be implied categorically in the terms "multiethnic" and "ethnic diversity." Likewise, linguistic differences are assumed in the idea of multiethnicity, but the specific challenges of and solutions to those differences are outside the bounds of this paper. Though the formal boundaries of such concepts may not lie within the technical concept of "ethnicity," for present purposes they have been bundled together for "rhetorical efficiency." Cf. Hughes, "Following Jesus as his Community in the Broken World of Ethnic Identity," 341.

[57] Cf. Kathleen Garces-Foley, *Crossing the Ethnic Divide: The Multiethnic Church on a Mission.* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2007), 12-13.

[58] Mark DeYmaz and Harry Li, *Leading a Healthy Multi-Ethnic Church: Seven Common Challenges and How to Overcome Them* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 39. DeYmaz and Li also note that it also avoids coordinating congregational diversity with the secular ideal of "multiculturalism." Various authors use various terms more or less synonymously with the present paper's definition of "ethnic" and "multiethnic."

surrounding congregational segregation.[59] The follow up a few years later, *United by Faith,* defined "a racially mixed congregation as one in which no one racial group is 80 percent or more of the congregation."[60] While, of course the New Testament's eschatological metric of an "innumerable" assembly composed of "every" group does not permit dogmatism on percentages, this 80/20 boundary has developed a solid pedigree and remains a helpful reference point.[61]

Given these definitions, this section will argue that the diverse character of the eschatological assembly specifically implies that individual local congregations should likewise be diverse. The comprehensively diverse character of the heavenly assembly is clear: "from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages." A quartet of population markers defines this diversity: ἔθνος (nation, people, foreigner, Gentile),[62] φυλή (blood-relative, tribe),[63] λαός (people, people-group),[64] γλῶσσα (tongue, language).[65] The discussion above staked out the boundaries of "ethnicity" such that it roughly encompasses all four of these characteristics. Put another way, the heavenly assembly does not permit any point of human separation or segregation other than the

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[59] Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

[60] Curtiss Paul DeYoung, Michael O. Emerson, George Yancey, and Karen Chai Kim, *United by Faith: The Multiracial Congregation as an Answer to the Problem of Race* (New York: Oxford, 2004), 2.

[61] Cf. DeYmaz and Li, *Leading a Healthy Multi-ethnic Church*, 24. So also Soong-Chan Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism: Freeing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity* (Downer's Grove: InterVarsity, 2009), 85. Additionally, the importance of diverse leadership is emphasized by James David Noble who says that "a multi-ethnic congregation" is "one that has a diversified leadership as well as a diverse membership" ("Preaching to the Great Multitude: An Examination of the Impact of Multi-ethnicity in Select Evangelical Congregations in America" [PhD Dissertation, Mid-America Baptist Theology Seminary, 2013], 5, n. 6). Cf. Crouse, "A Missiological Evaluation," 241.

[62] Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3rd edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 276.

[63] Ibid., 1069.

[64] Ibid., 586.

[65] Ibid., 201.

watershed of the bloodshed of Christ. "The church itself is not made up of natural 'friends.' It is made up of natural enemies."[66]

The New Testament positions such reconciliation of diverse ethnicities very close to the heart of the gospel itself. Paul's argument in Ephesians 2:11-22 points this direction.[67] The exposition of the gospel in 2:1-10 in terms of new life in Christ functions as a ground for the next element in the argument, beginning in 2:11: "Therefore, remember..." The Apostle calls for Gentiles to recollect their former status: "separated," "alienated," "strangers," hopeless, God-less (2:12). But the gospel of the blood of Jesus has brought them near (2:13), a point further explained in 2:14: "For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility." Two actions, unification of separated groups and destruction of separating barriers, Paul further explains by the purpose clause, introduced by ἵνα, "so that he might create one new humanity" (2:15) and "he might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross" (2:16).

Thus, God, in the gospel, purposes to reconcile separated humanity to himself and to one another "through the violent, bloody death of Jesus."[68] Yes, divisions and reconciliation between Jews and Gentiles were more than simply "ethnic" or "racial," being fundamentally "theological."[69] Still, the theology of both groups required reordering in light of the Gospel, whether in large parts true but incomplete (Jews) or

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[66] D.A. Carson, *Love in Hard Places* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2002), 61, quoted in Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 131.

[67] On Ephesians 2:11-22 see Lynn Cohick, *Ephesians*, New Covenant Commentary Series. (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2010) 71-79; Jarvis J. Williams says that "this is perhaps the strongest NT text that addresses racial reconciliation" ("The Post-Racial Church: A Biblical Framework for Multiethnic Reconciliation," *Themelios* 37:2 [2012)]: 408).

[68] Jarvis J. Williams, "Violent Ethno-racial Reconciliation: A Mystery in Ephesians and Its Jewish Martyrological Background," *Criswell Theological Review* 12:2 (2015): 125; Gary Gromacki, "Paul's Ecclesiology of Ephesians," *Journal Of Ministry & Theology* 19:1 (2015): 82-115 explores the range of ecclesiological metaphors in Ephesians.

[69] "We must take care, then, today when drawing parallels with current ethnic tensions or racial issues. These analogies are useful but somewhat limited in that no two other groups today carry the theological weight of the Jew/Gentile division" (Cohick, *Ephesians*, 88).

largely misguided (non-proselyte Gentiles). Thus the implications for current discussions of reconciliation still pertain.[70] The breadth of such diversity shows through in a *locus classicus* on this theme, Galatians 3:28, which permits no division of religious, ethnic, or cultural heritage ("neither Jew nor Greek") or socio-economic or hierarchical stratum ("neither slave nor free, [...] no male and female").[71]

These texts sing in harmony with the song of Revelation 5:9: "Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation." The glory of the slain Lamb is here directly related to the comprehensively diverse congregation he has assembled by virtue of his blood. And, thus, the local church proleptically testifies to and expresses its own eternal nature as it becomes increasingly ethnically diverse.

Diversity as part of the nature of the church, however, should not lead a church to become simultaneously "unfaithful to its own nature."[72] This is not diversity for its own sake. It is diversity for Christ's sake, for his glory in the heavens (Rev. 5:9-10); as Ephesians 3:10 likewise explains that the glory of God is especially displayed in the church. Contextually the church in Ephesians 3:10 must be understood in light of the reconciled diversity expounded by the Apostle throughout the epistle (chapter 2 and elsewhere).[73] God receives glory in his church, *especially* in his ethnically reconciled church. "A unified diverse church is God's plan of redemption."[74] Thus, just as the purity of a local church's regenerate

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[70] Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 191; Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 245.

[71] Stephen J. Lennox, "'One in Christ': Galatians 3:28 and the Holiness Agenda" *Evangelical Quarterly* 84:3 (2012), notes how this verse began to be newly appropriated for egalitarian uses following Emancipation (205). Cf. Lynn H. Cohick, "Tyranny, Authority, Service: Leadership and Headship in the New Testament" *Ex Auditu* 28 (2012): 77; Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians: Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 257.

[72] Küng, 301.

[73] O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, 246.

[74] Cohick's entire quote is worth consideration: "Paul does not preach a 'gospel' message and then tack onto it an optional picture of a multi-cultural church. Instead, the gospel message in Ephesians unfolds by stressing forgiveness of sins

membership testifies to the character of the one, holy, catholic eschatological assembly, so also does the local church's ethnic diversity.[75] Both are constituent elements of an eschatologically faithful congregation. Though neither belong to the *sine qua non* of the local church's essence, both stand as key elements of a local church's health and well-being.

A Healthy Church: Pure and Diverse

Church health depends in part upon its membership being an ethnically diverse congregation of regenerate believers. This argument builds upon Jason Duesing's framework of ecclesiological triage, defining the *esse* of the church by the Reformation marks of Word and sacrament/ordinance, along with a mutual intentionality of believers to gather as a church.[76] All of these first tier elements constitute the *sine qua non* of the local church's being.[77] In the context of the argument of the present paper, they would be required for the church's *esse* because their absence would render membership itself a non-existent category, thus dissolving the need to discuss the nature of membership.

Secondarily, belonging to the category of *bene esse* is "an almost unlimited list of items one would affirm aid the health of churches."[78] Here are listed: modes and practices of the ordinances, leadership, church discipline, regenerate membership, mission, and expository preaching. Here this paper proposes the addition of "multiethnic" to "regenerate" as

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through Christ's blood (1:7) as a mystery (1:9), which in 3:3–10 is further explained as Gentiles becoming heirs with Jews in Christ. Forgiveness includes not simply a 'not guilty' stamp, but also a new group identity. This reality is an inseparable part of the gospel message, not an optional politically correct stance. A unified diverse church is God's plan of redemption" (Cohick, *Ephesians*, 91).

[75] Both regeneracy and multiethnicity building on the apostolic foundation express oneness, holiness, catholicity.

[76] Jason G. Duesing, "A Denomination Always for the Church: Ecclesiological Distinctives as a Basis for Confessional Cooperation," in Allen, *The SBC in the 21st Century*, 120.

[77] "Items essential to a true church" (Duesing, 120). Cf. Volf, 131.

[78] Duesing, 119. Cf. Chad Owen Brand and R. Stanton Norman, *On Church Government: Five Views on Church Polity* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2004), 217; Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 263.

an equally constituent element of the local church's *bene esse* in terms of membership.

One might contemplate the two categories by way of theological analogy, with the church's *esse* aligning with individual justification and its *bene esse* with individual progressive sanctification. Justification is the *sine qua non* of an individual's Christian identity. It stands as an either/or reality. Progressive sanctification, however, is the steady and often uneven shaping of a Christian into his or her eschatological self in Christ. It stands constantly in-process-of-being-completed, to a greater or lesser degree, across time. Similarly, the local church will be increasingly shaped in its health (or "sanctified"), but its conformity to its eschatological nature will always be incomplete until the eschaton itself. And therefore a local church whose membership is in part unregenerate or wrongly homogeneous may be irregular or disordered, unhealthy and in need of sanctification.[79] As Jürgen Moltmann says, "The notion of anticipation [....] picks up the ancient doctrine of sanctification."[80] Yet this in-process-of-being-sanctified church nonetheless stands "justified" as a true church.

That said, the continued absence of a noticeable progression of sanctifying grace in an individual's life subjectively may indicate the absence of that person's justified standing objectively. Likewise, an obstinate and prevailing unwillingness to pursue purity and diversity can compromise the very *esse* of a church, if it reveals a sufficiently fatal compromise of the gospel. In other words, tolerating sin generally and ethnic alienation or discrimination specifically can compromise the very *esse* of a church itself. As Volf says, "Peter did not merely behave badly by refusing fellowship to Gentile Christians, but betrayed the truth of the Gospel itself (Gal. 2:11-14); so also is a discriminatory church not merely a bad church, but no church at all; it is unable to do justice to the catholicity of the eschatological people of God."[81] How then does a church navigate the sometimes stormy waters of its own sanctification? How does it sing along in harmony with the dissonant music of its own stumbling pursuit of God's best? Next we will explore an answer.

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[79] Of course, this is true of every true church, whether committed to ethnically diverse and regenerate membership or not. "Not that they have already attained it or been made perfect," as the Apostle might have said it.

[80] Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*, 24.

[81] Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 158.

Inaugurated Purity and Diversity

Over the past generation inaugurated eschatology has become well established, and the consensus is that "eschatological tension was a characteristic feature of NT theology."[82] Prolepsis helps describe more specifically the character of this tension. As quoted above, Paul Leer-Salvesen explains "prolepsis" as "the hope of a future which has already started."[83] Prolepsis, in this way, can be seen as expressing both the subjective and objective hope of the church in its existence "in-between" the kingdom's inauguration and consummation. Within this "in-between" the church must explore and express the sanctifying work of God in its midst.[84] The church must constantly renew its apprehension of what it means that it has "already come to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God (Heb. 12:22), but at the same [it seeks] the coming city (Heb. 13:14)."[85]

This space between "already" and "not yet" helps to explain the failure of a local church to arrive in space and time at the indicative and imperative purity and diversity that eschatologically defines it. As Volf says, "The church reflects in a broken fashion the eschatological communion of the entire people of God with the triune God in God's new

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[82] Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 96. Cf. F.F. Bruce, "Eschatology," *London Quarterly & Holborn Review* 183 (1958): 99-103. Here Bruce outlines the emergence of this consensus in its nascent stages, crediting Oscar Cullmann and W.G. Kümmel. Most evangelicals have been deeply dependent on the work of George Eldon Ladd, *The Presence of the Future* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974); *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974).

[83] Leer-Salvesen, "Reconciliation Without Violence," 175.

[84] "Ecclesiology is the theological reflection on the mystery of God's desire to be among us. More specifically [...] the systematic reflection on the shape which this dwelling of God takes in the community of Christ that journeys between Pentecost and *parousia*" (George Vandervelde, "The Challenge of Evangelical Ecclesiology," *Evangelical Review Of Theology* 27:1 [2003]: 10).

[85] Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 34. Darryl Wooldridge and Daniel Lioy "Living in the Not-Yet" *Hervormde Teologiese Studies* 71:1 (2015): 1-9, articulate an over-realized eschatology when they say the "'not-yet', experienced 'now', ushers in the kingdom life and a glorification of God in his creation especially in human beings in *prolepsis*" (8).

creation."[86] Inaugurated eschatology explains this often unfaithful and fractured reflecting, because the church lives in a "transitional period" which "combines characteristics of both [...] the old age prior to the coming of the Messiah and the age to come, the eternal state."[87]

First, churches fail at the eschatological ideal of regenerate membership. Of course, some true churches (marked by the presence of the gospel, the ordinances, and mutual commitment to gather as the church) willingly and heartily reject regenerate membership as an imperative category.[88] Here the inaugurated nature of theological understanding provides explanatory help in terms of the noetic limitations of the present age. Here "we know in part" and such ecclesiological short-circuiting is explained by the fact that the consummated kingdom is yet-to-come. But when it does fully arrive, and the purified people of God gather around the throne, Baptists can say cheekily yet wholeheartedly, "We will all be Baptists then."[89]

Still, Baptist churches themselves fail to attain to their own ideals.[90] Of course, some may "not evaluate carefully whether people believe before joining the church."[91] But even those passionately committed to this ideal fall short. Speaking regarding corrective church discipline, Oliver O'Donovan's point pertains to the admission of members, in that a church's "judgments are vulnerable to the hiddenness of the future: in that nobody knows what an individual will become."[92] This unknown of

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[86] Volf, 235.

[87] Alexander E. Stewart, "The Temporary Messianic Kingdom in Second Temple Judaism and the delay of the Parousia: Psalm 110:1 and the Development of Early Christian Inaugurated Eschatology," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 59:2 (2016): 270.

[88] "True churches can be divided between those true churches that are regular and those that are irregular" (Dever, *The Church*, 95, n.12).

[89] Tom J. Nettles and Russell D. Moore ed., *Why I Am a Baptist* (Nashville, TN: B&H, 2001), xviii.

[90] "I don't know of any Baptist anywhere who believes that the concept of a regenerate church has guaranteed Baptists a regenerate church," (Walter B. Shurden, Sr., "Baptist Pavement, Baptist Potholes, and a P.S. Concerning Baptist Freedom," *Baptist History And Heritage* 1 [2015]: 81).

[91] Thomas R. Schreiner and Shawn D. Wright, eds., *Believer's Baptism: Sign of the New Covenant in Christ* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2006), 3, n. 7.

[92] Oliver O'Donovan, *Resurrection and Moral Order*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 176.

the future, but more specifically of the impossibility of knowing the interior state of a person's heart, means that it is epistemologically impossible to guarantee regenerate church membership. Of course, Jesus himself knew this and thus outlined the practice of church discipline (Mt. 18:15-20; 1 Cor. 5:1-13).[93] Thus the local assembly acts with eschatological fidelity when it acts in accordance with its own nature as the purified people of God gathered around the throne, admitting to membership only those bearing the fruit of regeneracy; and, likewise, when it acts consistently to discipline those members who do not bear fruit in keeping with repentance.

Second, how does the in-between location of the church relate to ethnically diverse membership? It interplays in several ways. First, while ensuring regenerate membership is epistemologically impossible "in-between the times," achieving comprehensively ethnically diverse membership ("every tongue, tribe, people, nation") is "not yet" ontologically possible. While actual regenerate membership is possible, ethnic variegation of the local church will always be under-realized until the eschaton. Still, eschatologically faithful churches will recognize in faith that God has "determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place" (Acts 17:26). As such, an individual local church will wholeheartedly embrace its portion from the Lord in terms of the ethnic composition of its location in space and time. This "spatio-temporal" existence constrains the boundaries of any specific church's expression of ethnic diversity.[94]

Within this framework, local churches may express a number of varying degrees of faithfulness to the comprehensive ethnic diversity belonging to their eschatological nature. First, some churches are contextually able but formally unwilling to embrace ethnically diverse members. Such a church stands in terrifying danger of compromising its very *esse* as it has horribly misapprehended the gospel itself.[95] Second, some churches are contextually able and formally willing to embrace

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[93] "Paedobaptist churches will necessarily admit unregenerate persons to the membership; credo baptists will only do so accidentally, and they can correct the fault by the exercise of church discipline" (Wright, *Believer's Baptism*, 227)

[94] Cf. Allison, *Sojourners and Strangers*, 148-157.

[95] Interestingly, Garrett, in the early 1960s no less, floats the idea that practices of "race hatred, prejudice, and violence" are grounds for discipline and excommunication ("Seeking A Regenerate Church Membership," 36).

ethnically diverse members, but functionally they refuse to embrace anything other than their own ethnic expression of the gospel. They are Peter standing away from the Gentiles' table for fear of the Jews. Such churches will accept τὰ ἔθνη into their local fellowship, if only these nations will become as they are. This issue of functionally required ethnic assimilation is perhaps the highest hurdle for the cultivation of multiethnic local churches in the current ecclesial moment.[96]

Third, some churches are functionally and formally willing to cultivate ethnic diversity, but they are spatio-temporally constrained in homogenous communities. Before a church marshals this excuse, however, it must more closely examine its own spatio-temporal context. Many communities in the United States, for example, have diverse populations within a normally drivable distance, and as such they suffer not from homogeneity but segregation.[97] Likewise, when the cultural and socio-economic connections to ethnicity are understood, it becomes clear that profound diversity is usually possible. For example, the church must recognize that closely connected to the idea of ethnic diversity is socio-economic diversity. Jesus said, "You will always have the poor among you," but many churches verge on making Jesus a liar. On this point, they are socio-economically homogenous. Thus even if formal ethnic diversity

[96] Cf. Rah, *The Next Evangelicalism*; Mark Lau Branson and Juan Francisco Martínez. *Churches, Cultures and Leadership: A Practical Theology of Congregations and Ethnicities.* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011); Anthony B. Bradley, ed. *Aliens in the Promised Land: Why Minority Leadership is Overlooked in White Christian Churches and Institutions* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2013); Ronald T. Michener, "The Kingdom of God and Postmodern Ecclesiologies: A Compatibility Assessment" *Evangelical Review Of Theology* 34:2 (2010): 119-130, argues that "intentional multi-national, multi-cultural contexts within our churches" offer the best way forward "in the postmodern climate" (130). Thorsten Prill, "Migration, Mission and the Multi-ethnic Church" *Evangelical Review Of Theology* 33:4 (2009): 332-346, says, "Luke points out that at the Council of Jerusalem the early church decided to have a non-assimilation policy" (344).

[97] Nate Silver, "The Most Diverse Cities Are Often The Most Segregated," *FiveThirtyEight;*
http://fivethirtyeight.com/features/the-most-diverse-cities-are-often-the-most-segregated/.

eludes a church, there will be other profound opportunities to witness to the diversity of the eschatological bride of Christ.[98]

All three groups of churches, and in fact all churches, should constantly be reminded, "The kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel" (Mk. 1:15). And as they continually repent and renew themselves in the gospel, they will be able to more fully and faithfully anticipate the "great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes."

Conclusion

This paper has proposed that a local church is a proleptic expression of the eschatological church and that this proleptic character implies that the membership of a healthy local church should be regenerate and ethnically diverse. The inevitable shortcomings in a local church's conformity to this ideal have been explored in relationship to its place "in-between" the inauguration and consummation of God's kingdom and the church's constant need for repentance and renewal in God's sanctifying grace.

Ecclesiological conviction has been a mark of Baptist distinction for centuries. And in the coming time such ecclesiological conviction can uniquely position Baptists to faithfully cultivate churches that more fully express the purity and diversity of the bride that will gather in astounded worship around the heavenly throne.

[98] "Paul anticipates that in such a fellowship, the mutual obligation of loving unity across racial, geographic and cultural lines would work itself out in tangible acts of generosity, potentially flowing osmosis-like in both directions as needed (2 Cor 8:13–15)" (Jason B. Hood, "Theology in Action: Paul, the Poor, and Christian Mission," *Southeastern Theological Review* 2:2 [2011]: 130).