

Without Crossing Barriers? One in Christ vs. Discipling Diverse Cultures

VICTOR HAYWARD AND DONALD MCGAVRAN

AS the battle for brotherhood rages round the world, questions like these arise. Does winning the battle mean an end to cultural diversity? What effect will winning it have on discipling men of myriad cultures? Will discipling the tribes help win the battle, or multiply race and class distinctions within the Church? Must the Church always manifest its supranational nature?

Victor E.W. Hayward, formerly Associate General Secretary for Relationships with Christian Councils of the World Council of Churches, left Geneva in 1972, and is now Research Secretary for a China Study project with headquarters at Selly Oaks Colleges, Birmingham, B29 6LE, England. Donald Anderson McGavran is Senior Professor of Mission at the School of World Mission, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, California. These two men debate the above questions in the following correspondence. At one point, Arthur Glasser, Dean of the School of World Mission, enters the lists and breaks spears with Victor Hayward.

Many thinking Christians are puzzled concerning cultural integrity and the unity of the Church. They wonder how the Church can be One in Christ and yet diverse in culture. They ask, should we encourage or allow the formation of one-race or one-class churches?

In the following letters readers are exposed to two views. Hayward says, "The *crucial* application of the Gospel to the Christian community was precisely the crossing of the racial barrier and the demonstration (which was not what either the Jews or Gentiles liked) that in Christ, Jew and Gentile were made one." McGavran declares, "Men like to become Christians

without crossing linguistic, racial, or class barriers — and should be encouraged to do so.”

The letters constitute contemporary comment on missions. They were written between 1971 and 1973. The article which began the debate was published in the *Church Growth Bulletin* in May, 1971. In spite of their disagreement on this subject, Hayward and McGavran are old friends and address each other as Victor and Donald. *Missiology* is pleased to be able to publish the entire correspondence with the kind permission of both men.

— Editor

150 route de Ferney
Geneva
August 16, 1971

Dear Donald,

It is quite a time since we have been in correspondence. I shall now prove that I do continue to read *Church Growth Bulletin*. I refer to the issue for May, 1971.

Let me start by saying that I quite agree with the quotation on page 145 from Bishop Neill on the subject of “Conversion”.

The purpose of this letter, however, is to beg you to think again about the opening sentence of that bulletin — “Men like to become Christians without crossing linguistic, racial or class barriers.” Of course they do — because they can then evade the challenge of the Gospel and of the Christian Church just where it becomes most real, most painful and most meaningful!

I am not going to take up the linguistic point, because I agree that *normally* people should be able to hear the Gospel and to worship God in their own tongue.

But, unless I have completely misunderstood the New Testament, the *crucial* application of the Gospel to the Christian community was precisely the crossing of a racial barrier, and the demonstration (which was not what either Jews or Gentiles *liked*) that in Christ, Jew and Gentile were made one. Similarly, with educated and barbarian, free man and slave, living the Gospel meant demonstrating its power to overcome class barriers. And that was why the Early Church grew.

Your enthusiasm for numerical growth has, I regretfully

assert, led you to deny the very essence of the nature of the Church. Again and again, in my missionary career, I have been dismayed to find Christian churches denying the Gospel by making it evident that racial and provincial loyalties count more with them than loyalty to Christ. Heaven preserve us from growth at that demonic cost!

Yours as ever,
Victor

School of World Mission, Fuller Seminary
Pasadena, California
August 26, 1971

Dear Dr. McGavran,

A letter from the Rev. Victor Hayward of Geneva has come which I think you ought to see at once. I know you said to forward nothing except the most urgent, but Mr. Hayward thinks your lead article in the May *Church Growth Bulletin* is demonic! I am very worried about it. I am enclosing a copy of the May issue so you can see what dreadful mistakes have been made. I am sure you did not mean to be demonic. Perhaps we can make amends in the November Bulletin. I hope you are having a good vacation. Everything here is going along as usual. It's awfully hot.

Sincerely your secretary,
Frances Junker

The offending article in the May, 1971, *Church Growth Bulletin*.

Without Crossing Barriers

“Men like to become Christians without crossing linguistic, racial or class barriers.”

This vitally important principle of church growth explains, in part, why some congregations grow and others do not.

In March, 1971, career missionaries, studying at the School of World Mission and Institute of Church Growth, contributed, from their experience in many lands, illustrations of this principle. The Rev. Walther Olsen, missionary to France, selected the following, believing they would help nationals and missionaries be more effective communicators of the Gospel.

Biblical hurdles to accepting Christ must, of course, be left in place. But non-biblical hurdles should be removed. Men must repent of their sins and believe on Jesus Christ, for that is a biblical hurdle. Since nothing in the Bible requires a man (in becoming a Christian) to study the Bible or worship God in a foreign language, it is poor policy to require that to become a baptized believer, the convert must cross linguistic lines. That non-biblical hurdle should be removed.

Churches tend to grow when men becoming Christian join others of their own race — tribe, sub-tribe, caste, or clan. When becoming Christian means joining a different “breed” of men, church growth is always slowed down. Sometimes it is stopped. Conglomerate churches grow slowly.

The following incidents show how, in many lands, observing the principle speeds up, and disregarding it slows down, the propagation of the Gospel.

Without Crossing Linguistic Barriers:

Vietnam: in 1954, about 10,000 Thai people from North Vietnam came to the South and settled in Tung-Nghie, about 20 miles from Dalat. Several hundred of these turned to the Lord by the influence of a Thai Christian who worked for the government and by the relief program of the Vietnamese Church. A church was built and a Vietnamese preacher was sent there to shepherd them. The Gospel has been preached in Vietnamese and the services have been in Vietnamese. During the last 16 years, five Vietnamese preachers were assigned one after another to that church and that people. The church “plateaued” for many years, after which it declined. The linguistic barrier prevents the church from growing. The Thai people have their own language. Their men speak Vietnamese but their women do not. They use their own language in their own homes. The Vietnamese preacher does not speak Thai; the Bible is not translated in Thai. If the Thai could become Christian without crossing the linguistic barrier, thousands will come to the Lord. — Truong-van-Tot.

Brazil: When the Janz team, a Canadian evangelistic team working in Germany, conducted a campaign in Curitiba, Brazil, about two years ago, the German message was completely translated into Portuguese. However, the whole campaign had a German overtone. As a result, it did not really penetrate the

Portuguese community although it produced good results among those who still speak German. — John Klassen.

California: Out of approximately 650 Taiwanese-speaking students in Los Angeles, about 50 were attending different Chinese or American churches, and only a handful were participating occasionally in other church activities. When a Taiwanese-speaking church was formed in Los Angeles, the total attendance tripled in three months. Many are actively at work. — Samuel Kim.

Without Crossing Class and Race Barriers:

India: In my study of congregations in the city of Madras, I found that churches grew best in one ethnic unit. Churches established in a *peta* (ward) of one caste, grew faster and better than conglomerate churches containing all castes. Both Emmanuel Baptist and Bethel Baptist began to grow when their members (Mala by background) after separation from two conglomerate mother churches, *evangelized their own caste*.

More remarkable was the following case. There was practically no growth from Malas while the Mala Christians were mixed in with the predominantly Madiga community of the St. Thomas Mount Baptist Church. Then, the Malas separated and formed the Bethel Church. Immediately, a web movement started among the non-Christian Malas. One family after another came for baptism. The movement is still going on. — Gollapalli Cornelius.

The Bahamas: The poorer people (few possessions, no formal education, living in drunkenness and fornication, unable to obtain or hold a good-paying job) do not come to our churches even though I have been able to enter into intimate friendships with them. This is probably because the national Christians are better dressed and better educated. They are not aware of this class distinction *but the poor people are*. — Dick Kay.

France: A French pastor warned our missionaries against working with both low and middle classes simultaneously. He affirmed that to do so would alienate both. We gave him slight credence, but soon found that these two groups do *not* mix. Middle class parents withdrew their children from a C.E.F. "club" when they learned of the presence of lower class children. — Walther Olsen.

Japan: Burakumin (descendents of the outcast feudal group) of Japan live in segregated communities outside metropolitan areas. Meetings in the home of a Christian woman in such a community were well attended. But to come the half mile into town to meet with Christians at regular or special meetings was an insurmountable barrier. — Mildred Morehouse.

Nigeria: The Tiv Church is one of the fastest growing Churches in Nigeria. The Tiv number more than a million and have their own language. Partly because the Reformed Mission has used the Tiv language for worship and Christian instruction, and Tiv converts poured into Tiv-speaking congregations, growth has been large and now more than 150,000 souls attend church every Sunday.

However, a large clan in the western reaches of Tivland has been very cold towards the Gospel. Many evangelists from other Tiv clans have been sent in there with very poor results. The people apparently think that to become Christian means renouncing their own clan. The Church is now waiting for one of the few converts from this clan to finish his Bible training, and is praying this resistant clan will see they can become Christians without crossing clan barriers. — Abe Vreeke.

School of World Mission
Pasadena, California
September 15, 1971

Dear Victor,

Your welcome letter of early August meets me as I get back to my desk. I rejoice that you read the *Church Growth Bulletin*.

You are raising an important question, and I want to understand the area of your criticism. We agree on the following points — (a) that men do like to become Christians without crossing language, race and class barriers. (b) that Christ does break down the dividing wall of hostility between followers of the Way.

But we apparently disagree in between. Let us see where. You agree it would not be right to require converts whose mother tongue is English, to join and worship with a French congregation. But you seem to say that converts must be prepared to

forget race and class. They seek to become *Christians*, and in the Body there can be no racial or class distinctions. Do I hear you correctly?

The matter is complex. Many sharp definitions are needed. For example, how would you answer the following questions? Please underline the word you favor.

1. Pasadena has 60,000 blacks and 180,000 whites. We agree that it is wrong to bar any man of any race or color who wishes to worship with or visit any church.

Question: Is it sinful, inadvisable, or desirable in starting a new church in Pasadena to plan for it to be in a black (or white) neighborhood, and therefore, dominantly black or white?

2. In the Kond Hills, the Church is composed of Konds and Panos, who are acutely conscious of being different castes which never intermarry or interdine.

Questions: (i) Is it sinful, inadvisable, or desirable to start dominantly Kond or dominantly Pano congregations? (ii) Must each would-be convert before baptism agree to intercommune, interdine, or intermarry with Christians of the other caste? Yes. No.

3. In Nairobi multi-tribe congregations are common among the English-speaking elite. Among the semi-literate tribes, one-tribe congregations are common.

Question: Are multi-tribe congregations essentially more Christian than one-tribe congregations?

4. In Guatemala, more than half the people are Indians and less than half are mestizos. Protestant churches have arisen chiefly among the mestizos. To become a protestant means to become a mestizo. Most Indians speak Spanish.

Questions: (i) Under these circumstances, is it desirable, essential or wrong to encourage Indian congregations made up (98%) of Indians to arise? (ii) Must Indian converts allow racial considerations to keep them out of the mestizo congregations? Yes. No.

If you will simply underscore the right word or phrase, or answer the questions yes, no, or sometimes, I shall know how to reply to your letter.

Fraternally yours,
Donald

150 route de Ferney
Geneva
September 21, 1971

Dear Donald,

Thank you for your reply of September 15th. I am happy to answer this, but refuse to do so in the little boxes more suitable for a Gallup Poll than for theological discussion!

Regarding our two points of agreement with which your letter starts, I would add to (b) that Christ brings all who belong to Him into One Body.

My concession to worship in one's mother tongue is cultural, not racial, and I commend congregations which do resolutely seek to surmount this, as many do in Africa, in multilingual services. They have the right idea.

I do not say that "in the Body there can be no racial or class distinction," but that in the Body, racial and class distinctions must be overcome, insofar as they divide Christians from one another.

It is natural to have dominantly black or white congregations in Pasadena, and dominantly Kond or Pano congregations in the Kond Hills, but they must be open to people of the other colour or tribe, and it is very desirable, that in favourable locations, mixed congregations should be deliberately established. In the Kond Hills, any Kond candidate for baptism should be prepared to intercommune and interdine with Pano Christians; intermarriage is probably socially inadvisable, but not on Christian grounds.

In Nairobi, multitribal congregations show a more developed understanding of the significance of the Christian Church. In Guatemala, mestizo congregations should go out of their way to welcome Indian members.

Let me conclude by putting my point of view in reverse. When I first visited Guyana (things are better now), I found a nation rent by division between those of Indian and of African descent. Churches were either Indian or African — and could do nothing to fulfill the essential function of the Christian Church, to bring reconciliation and mutual understanding into the community.

Cordially yours,
Victor

School of World Mission
Pasadena, California
October 1, 1971

Dear Victor,

Many thanks for your good letter of September 21st. As I study it, I am convinced that we are not far apart. I, too, believe profoundly that Christ brings all who belong to Him (I would say, have committed their lives to Him) into One Body.

Your paragraph 5: "but they must be open to people of other color or tribe . . . be deliberately established." Agreed.

Your paragraph 6: "In Guatemala mestizo congregations should go out of their way to welcome Indian members." Agreed. And Indian congregations to welcome mestizo members, too.

Do read chapter 11 in *Understanding Church Growth*. It deals with the question quite extensively. Yet, since I do not like it when men answer my letters saying, "go, read my book," let me advance a thought or two which I trust you will find reasonable and meliorating.

1. Of course, Christ breaks down the middle wall or partition. Men in whom Christ dwells love more, hate less, understand more, sympathize more, treat others more kindly, and see each other as parts of Christ's Body and, hence, are essentially *One*. Of course.

Yet, He does it only for those who become parts of His Body.

And we do not advance the cause of brotherhood and justice by keeping sinners out of the Body. The Church is not a society of the ultra good, but of forgiven sinners on their way to the Savior.

The New Testament Church, for perhaps 20 years, was made up exclusively of the circumcised. "They spake the word to none but Jews." And it *had* to begin that way. It could not have begun any other way. Then, the Holy Spirit at Antioch led in many Gentiles also. I am totally unwilling to say that for those 20 years the Church and the apostles were *not really* the Church, and had not made the crucial application of the Gospel to daily life. I rather say that they lacked perfecting. It came in God's good time.

2. You and I both want brotherhood. Mrs. McGavran and I

have been white members of a black church for years — though because of moving, are not now. I am in favor of marches and protests and social action for brotherhood.

But I do not find in the Bible anything which would justify anyone in requiring a particular degree of brotherly behavior (one that I highly approve of) as a *prerequisite for baptism*. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.” Justification by faith. This is New Testament. Maturation in faith, giving up sins, growth in grace, all these come. We should work at them. But we should not keep men out who don’t see things exactly as we do.

Indeed, to require men of other cultures to obey our convictions is the essence of paternalism. They must discover for themselves, under the leading of the Holy Spirit and according to the revelation of God in the Bible what God requires them to do. Otherwise they are obeying men, not God.

There is great danger that, because we in Eurica are fighting the battle of brotherhood and being belabored (justly) by dark skinned people for white pride, we shall create and enforce new hurdles into the kingdom — hurdles, of which the Bible knows nothing.

I once proposed to a professor of social ethics in a seminary that he and I start a new congregation in an unchurched Black community. He replied hotly, “I will never start another Black church. I will start only integrated churches.” Needless to say, he has started none. He was prostituting evangelism to brotherhood. He would have done better to start a black church and lead it and white churches on to greater and greater measure of brotherhood. Niebuhr used to say, that the good which can be accomplished must never be sacrificed for the good which cannot be.

3. The real application of the principle I printed in the May, 1971 *Church Growth Bulletin*, and to which you objected, (and which I trust you are now seeing as reasonable) is, however, not between white and black.

That battle is being won, and in a few decades will have historic interest only. The real application is in the thousands of cases where men are being kept out of eternal life because they have only one option of becoming Christians, — i.e., in a church where their language is not spoken, where their kind of people do not attend, where men and women of their income and

education are not found. They refuse to become Christians, not because they hate the Savior, but simply because the opportunity is not opened to them to join churches where they feel at home. This seems to me a pity. I shall be surprised if it does not seem a pity to you.

Amerindians in Guatemala are not even "hearing" the Gospel because it is lived and proclaimed in churches led by mestizos. Indians will not go to churches where they are a perpetual and silent minority, and the worship is in a cultural form strange to them.

In Orissa, Christianization in 1940-46 was handicapped because the top leaders were "Cuttack men." These were fellow Indians, but were not Garas — though they were good men and had nobly resolved to love the Gara Christians! Hence, the right procedure (which the Baptist Mission eventually followed) was to create Christian leaders out of the Gara Christians. People like to become Christians where their own kind of folk can become deacons and elders and preachers and executive secretaries.

We run across hundreds of illustrations of the principle from all continents. Failure to understand this principle is keeping many out of the Kingdom.

All we are saying in the *Church Growth Bulletin* is that doors should be opened to the Samaritans, and the Italians, and the Gentiles — without requiring them to become minority members in majority churches. For, while the majority *should* be fully loving, and deeply understanding, and go the tenth mile, it does not always do this. So it is *more Christian* to encourage men to worship with their own tribe and caste and income bracket and educational status, than to try to force them into conglomerate congregations where everyone is being *very nice* to everyone else.

On the other side, Victor, you and I are of one mind in regard to the following points. The majority party should treat the minority fairly and be kind and good. Christians of all parties should hold no racial or class pride. Should welcome everyone in the Church. Should establish conglomerate churches. Should train leaders in integrated schools and seminaries. Agreed. Agreed.

The principle, believe me, is important. Men do like to become Christians without crossing linguistic, class or race lines. We do far more toward breaking down the horrid barriers of racism when we encourage ethnic units to become Christians within

their ethnic unit, than when we insist on their joining conglomerate churches. How does all this sound to you?

All good wishes,

Sincerely yours,

Donald

150, route de Ferney

Geneva

November 15, 1971

Dear Donald,

Your helpful reply of October 1, unfortunately reached here just as I was setting off for a trip to the Middle East. After my return, I was plunged off into a week of staff meetings. Hence, the delay in this reply.

I have duly read chapter 11 of *Understanding Church Growth*, as well as your letter, for which I am grateful. Yes, you and I agree on many things, and we are now at least disagreeing within the same universe of discourse. But, I remain in disagreement on the crucial point which I first raised (in August).

I do agree with you that we have no right to add prerequisites for baptism to the fundamental one of faith. I agree that we shouldn't make it unnecessarily difficult for people to come into the Church, but that once in, they have to be "perfected", to use your terminology. On the other hand, I see the nature of the Church as vitally related to the Good News of what God is doing for man in history, as well as beyond it, and cannot interpret the Gospel *only* in individual terms.

You say "The New Testament Church for perhaps 20 years was made up exclusively of the circumcised." I think your figure is far too high. But I agree, that until the point had been raised and thrashed out, there was nothing wrong with the Christian Church being solely Jewish. Once the issue had been made clear, however, through the initiative of the Holy Spirit, the situation was thereafter altered forever.

I have agreed with you on the linguistic point. I also agree that we don't have to go out of our way deliberately to make things difficult. Yet, I contend that when the issue naturally arises, it must be made clear that the Church of Jesus Christ stands for the overcoming, and not the perpetuation, of racial and class barriers. This is part of what God is doing through Christ in

history. And sometimes people believe in the Gospel just *because* they see Christ working that miracle there. Anyway, at that juncture I see the necessary thing for man's salvation to be a demonstration of the purposes of God rather than the adherence of more individuals on a lowered basis. I have followed the line of your argument. I would be more impressed by it if you were able to give a few convincing illustrations of peoples who were willing to come into the Church because they were *not* asked to cross racial or class barriers, but afterwards, having been perfected, demonstrated that they had learned that as Christians they must do precisely that! As I said in my first letter, my observation, alas, is that again and again I find Christians making it evident that racial or provincial loyalties come first. Honestly, have *you* found much evidence for the genuine success of the perfecting of Christians who, in the first instance, would obviously have been "put off" by the more stringent demands?

I have always been impressed by the way our Lord let the Rich Young Ruler *go*; Jesus "loved him" — but He didn't lower His demand.

I don't think that we have to "insist on people's joining conglomerate churches"; that is rather different from deliberately providing for people being able to become Christians without crossing racial or class barriers. Once the issue is there, as I believe, it cannot be evaded without compromise that hurts the Christian cause.

With kind regards.

Sincerely yours,
Victor

School of World Mission
Pasadena, California
December 22, 1971

Dear Mr. Hayward,

Our esteemed leader and your friend, Dr. McGavran, is currently out of the country. He left on the 19th of November and does not expect to return until the 14th of March. In his own way he is on a "sabbatical" with 12 four-day Church Growth Seminars being taken along with an extended lecture assignment at the Union Biblical Seminary in Yeotmal, India! Because he is ranging rather widely (Taiwan to Indonesia to Thailand to

Ethiopia) we have felt it best to lift the correspondence burden from him. As a result, I am writing this in reply to your letter of November 15th. He will personally resume his correspondence with you after he returns. I trust that you find this agreeable.

Naturally, he has shared with us the substance of your earlier correspondence. We have been challenged by some of your insights, although we have also had our problems with the hermeneutic that you have employed. In our day, the rubric of what God is doing in history is made to be a large umbrella. All sorts of things are made normative for the Church by being rather arbitrarily placed under it. Whereas we gladly recognize that all good, all human progress, all movement toward justice in society is to be attributed to God's grace, we must plead that the correct hermeneutic in ascertaining God's will for the Church in the performance of her mission is to give primary attention to the didactic parts of the Scripture, rather than to any events in history that impress us as wholesome and good. As John R.W. Stott puts it: "What is promised to us in the teaching of Jesus, and in the sermons and writings of the apostles we are to appropriate, and what is commanded us we are to obey." This means that the sole entrance into the Church must remain Jesus Christ and not some application of His ethic to the human situation. The issue of Christ must transcend all other issues. We are not sure one can take the incident of Jesus and the rich young Jewish Ruler and make it apply directly to evangelism in the Third World today.

I feel sure, however, that Dr. McGavran would readily grant the fact that when a Church fails to "discern the Lord's body" and resists receiving all whom Christ manifestly received, it is denying Christ and in peril of losing its linkage with Christ. We need to realize that Dr. McGavran wanted to march at Selma and was only prevented by the pressure of circumstances in Eugene, Oregon. He is most eager to see the Church be the prophetic presence in society Christ wills it to have in today's world. But he is also eager to see that the Church not depart from being the gathering focus of sinners who claim no righteousness, but only believe on Jesus Christ for forgiveness and acceptance.

One of our anthropologists made an interesting observation on your request for evidence of Christians being so transformed by Christ that their "perfecting" brought them to take positions on social issues vastly different from the ones they had when first

converted. He wondered if you were monocultural in your viewpoint. Does Christ want to deculturalize a person to convert him? Does he want to depersonalize him? Is Christ desirous of transforming the peoples of this world into a monoculture that will remove all distractions? Hardly, for this is an impossibility, on an anthropological basis.

This comes with hearty greetings at Christmas.

Cordially in Christ,
Arthur F. Glasser, Dean

150 route de Ferney
Geneva
January 11, 1972

Dear Dr. Glasser,

I appreciate the courtesy of your acknowledgement of, and interim reply to, my letter of November 15th to Dr. McGavran. He is evidently interpreting "sabbatical" in a non-sabbatical way!

It would unnecessarily complicate matters if I were to reply at length to your letter. But I have known your name for a long time, though I am not sure that we have ever previously corresponded, and I would like to make just one or two remarks in response.

You can assure the anthropologist you mention that I am far from being monocultural in my viewpoint. I am all for pluralism — within unity.

We both have some difficulty with each other's hermeneutics. My concern is with such passages as Acts 15, Galatians 2, and Ephesians 2 — which seem to me to make evident that in New Testament times the Apostles were clear that there should not be separate Jewish and Gentile Churches, but one Church in which both could live in harmony. I agree with you about Peter's progress in this matter, as recorded in Acts 10. But does that mean that new Christians today can start where Peter was, or should start from where he arrived in Acts 10 and 11?

With prayerful good wishes for those gifts of the Spirit which alone can make any New Year.

Yours in Christ,
Victor E.W. Hayward

School of World Mission
Pasadena, California
October 10, 1972

Dear Victor,

We were at a most interesting spot in our correspondence about monoethnic and multiethnic congregations and denominations when I left to hold church growth seminars in Asia, Africa, and Europe. Arthur Glasser and you carried the discussion a bit further. Let me say, as I pick up the thread, that I agree with what Dr. Glasser has said. The evidence we receive at the School of Mission indicates that being a Christian does promote brotherhood. Existing congregations and denominations are a powerful influence toward a friendly world. Having said that, let me go back to the questions you asked in your letter of January eleventh.

(a) In view of Acts 15, Galatians 2, and Ephesians 2, must we hold that the Apostles were clear that there should be not separate Jewish and Gentile Churches, but one Church in which both could live in harmony?

(b) In view of Peter's progress as recorded in Acts 10, must we hold that Christians today may start where Peter was? Or from where he arrived in Acts 10 and 11?

Let me speak to each in turn.

(a) On the basis of the Bible — chapters quoted and others — must all Christians in any one city, regardless of their subcultures, belong to and worship in truly conglomerate, truly segmentless congregations? My answer is "no". The passages quoted do indicate that all members belong to one Body of Christ, but since the Church in each province and city of the first century existed as a group of "house churches," its very structure fit many subcultures. A given group of Christians belonged to only one of these house churches while *at the same time*, those very Christians were members of the Church of Christ in Corinth — or Ephesus or Antioch.

Many a loose federation of monoethnic congregations, all conscious of being parts of the Body of Christ, all counting their cultural form as "flesh", all glorying in being new creatures in Christ, all looking on the unsaved as "not our people" while looking on the saved of any sub-culture or linguistic group as "definitely our people," all accepting the Bible as the only rule of faith and practice, and Jesus Christ as the only Savior — *such a*

loose federation abundantly fulfills all that the Bible requires. In becoming disciples of Christ, Jews do not cease being culturally Jews and Gentiles do not cease being culturally Gentiles — any more than they quit talking Aramaic and Greek. Consequently, they “assemble” and worship with Christians with whom they feel at home. This seems to be behavior with which God is pleased. It is the New Testament pattern.

Of course, in situations where brotherly behavior toward Christians of other sub-cultures is in peril, each monoethnic congregation will make special effort not to become prideful or glory in the “flesh” of cultural differences.

(b) Should Christians start where Peter did, in Acts 10, or where he arrived in Acts 11? I reply that Christians always *start* where they are. What makes them Christians is not the degree of brotherhood toward other ethnic units which they practice, but the degree to which they love, trust, and obey the Lord Jesus. The glorious Church of Pentecost started as a strictly monoethnic, monocultural Church. (They spoke the word to none but Jews.) And remained such for maybe 20 years. When more than one ethnic or cultural unit accepts Christ and becomes “the people of God,” then, ideally, it is so filled with the Spirit that it counts all culture as refuse (its own and that of others) and, consequently, counts all the Spirit-filled as “especially our people.” Nevertheless, when each congregation worships, it normally and properly does so in its own neighborhood, with its own kind of people, with believers who speak its language, and with Christians “like us.” This evident truth must not, of course, be used as an excuse for Jewish Christians barring Gentile Christians from their worship. Gentile Christians will be welcomed by Jewish Christians to their worship and to their homes. But Gentile Christians, finding that fellowship is easier and more natural, and much more convenient among fellow Gentile Christians, will in the great majority of cases, worship in churches of their own sort. That they do so is not in the slightest degree sub-Christian behavior.

Sub-cultures are continually breaking down and merging into the dominant culture of the country. The existence of Christian churches in all the sub-cultures and ethnic groups will greatly speed up the process, for each congregation will hold that it belongs to the People of God, each congregation will reform its culture along the biblical lines which govern the People of God,

each congregation will meet on numerous occasions with Christians of other sub-cultures.

Christians do not start where Peter started. They start where the Church started on Pentecost and they proceed on to where the Church assembles before the throne — in which the linguistic lines and ethnic units and cultures are still distinct enough for John to write,

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no man could number, from every ethnos, from all tribes, and peoples, and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes . . . Rev. 7:9.

Doesn't all this seem reasonable to you? And biblical too? And what is continually going on to the glory of God?

Sincerely,
Donald

Summary Statement by Victor Hayward

The foregoing correspondence has helped to clarify what Dr. McGavran and I mean, and also what we do not mean, in the things for which we are contending. In the course of these letters, several important agreements have been reached. Nevertheless, it appears to me that we still disagree — though as brothers in Christ — on the fundamental issue with which we have been concerned.

We agree that, according to Biblical doctrine, salvation in Christ is offered to individuals, is granted by grace alone, and is to be appropriated solely by faith. But I further submit that, on that same Biblical basis, the acceptance of salvation means *ipso facto* incorporation into the Body of Christ, a reconciled and reconciling universal community which God has called into being as a foretaste and instrument of His saving purpose for mankind. There is no full appropriation of the Gospel without membership in the Christian Church. From the outset of his Christian life, the convert must realize that faithful discipleship means putting loyalty to Christ before any other sort of loyalty whatsoever, and membership in the Church before membership in any family, class, nation or race.

This does not mean that what Dr. McGavran calls “conglomerate” churches are the only real churches; it does not mean that

any "church" which deliberately excludes any human being from membership on grounds of culture, class or race has thereby forfeited the name of Christian, and that any Christian community which fails to care about or witness to the universality of the Church is hindering the cause of the Kingdom.

It is the Churches' task to make clear to all their members the nature of the Church and the relevance of that nature to human problems and to the Divine purpose. Men can become Christians without the actual local experience of crossing racial or class barriers; but they deny Christ if they refuse to cross such barriers when crossing or not crossing them becomes an issue. This, in no sense, implies a monocultural aim. I see it as the task of Christianity in today's world to help men appreciate more than ever, and rejoice in, their pluralistic cultures.

Reviewing our correspondence, I miss two things from Dr. McGavran's side. The first is the recognition of the tragic impotence, in many actual situations where society is torn by divisions, of churches of one class or culture to fulfill the Church's essential task. The second is any convincing reply to my honest question, "Have you found much evidence for the genuine success of the perfecting of Christians who, in the first instance, would obviously have been "put off" by the more stringent demands"? Finally, I query his statement that "the glorious Church of Pentecost started as a strongly monoethnic, monocultural Church." The variant reading of "devout men," instead of "devout Jews," in Acts 2:5 is probably an error, but were there not proselytes among those who heard Peter's sermon, and were not different cultures deliberately indicated by the emphasis on differing tongues? Although the welcoming of Gentiles into the Church had yet to come, surely the Pentecost experience was a prefiguration of communication of the Gospel to all the nations, a reversal of what happened at Babel? In my view, it does not matter if local congregations represent only one class or race because this is how they have naturally grown, provided the significance of the Church's universal nature is taught and understood; but it involves a betrayal of the Gospel and the Church, if they are deliberately formed of one race, tribe, sub-tribe, caste or clan, when the composition of their membership could have been broader, but was deliberately limited.

Summary Statement by Donald McGavran

This conversation began with the publication of the May, 1971 *Church Growth Bulletin* of an article called "Without Crossing Barriers." The opening sentence read: "Men like to become Christians without crossing linguistic, racial, or class barriers." The rest of the article developed the thought that such a liking or desire was normal and right, and should be respected as Christian churches multiply across all countries of the world.

Victor Hayward took sharp exception to the article and wrote, "I beg you to think again about that opening sentence. . . . Of course they do — because they can then evade the challenge of the Gospel . . . the crucial application of the Gospel to the [early] Christian community was precisely the crossing of a racial barrier. . . . Your enthusiasm for numerical growth has, I regretfully assert, led you to deny the very essence of the nature of the Church. . . . Heaven preserve us from growth at that demonic cost."

As the conversation concludes, this precise issue must be borne in mind. Is the desire of men to become Christians with their own kind, without crossing barriers, normal and right? Should it be respected and encouraged? Or is it demonic, a denial of the Gospel? *These are the crucial questions.*

In Mr. Hayward's Summary Statement, one sentence bears precisely on this issue. It reads: "Men can become Christian without the actual local experience of crossing racial or class barriers; but they deny Christ if they refuse to cross such barriers when crossing or not crossing becomes an issue."

With the first clause of this sentence, my good friend, Victor, really concedes the debate. In those few words he answers all the questions in the above paragraph affirmatively. True, his second clause adds some qualifications; but so do I. His qualifications are mine, also, and in no way controvert my main proposal.

With my agreement to the second clause of his sentence, Mr. Hayward may well believe that *I* have conceded the debate! For, from the beginning his great concern has been that brotherhood be not impaired. From the beginning I have insisted that encouraging man to become Christian without crossing class and racial barriers need not impair brotherhood — indeed, may be the best way to promote it.

Men like to become Christian without crossing barriers. In the

vast majority of cases, such a becoming is the only way they could become Christian and is normal and right. In some circumstances, loyalty to Christ demands that Christians cross barriers. When these circumstances prevail, barriers should, of course, be crossed. There can be no argument on that point.

Essential to correct thinking on this matter is to remember that becoming a Christian means just one thing — faith in Christ, confessing Him before men, and becoming an open baptized member of His Body. Once this has been done, innumerable ethical actions will, bit by bit, as the Christian grows in grace, become his normal way of acting. But these ethical actions are not the Gospel and must not be substituted for it. In mission, no mistake is more common than to load on the law and make becoming a Christian a series of good acts. Some of these are negative — don't drink, don't smoke, don't swear. Some are positive — be kind, be good, be brotherly, work for a just distribution of land and wages. I praise all these. Real Christians will trend in these directions. But none of these good things save.

Essential to correct thinking on this matter is also to remember the practice of the New Testament Church. Churches today must impose only those conditions for baptism and entry into the Body recorded in the New Testament. These are only three: faith, repentance, and confession. Because of the battle for brotherhood now raging, the temptation is enormous to add a fourth condition: to become a Christian you must cross a race or class barrier! The temptation must be resisted. Once we start loading on the law, where shall we stop? Let us bring men to Christ, confident that once they have accepted Him and fed on His Word, He will give them eyes to see what they should do and power to do it.

At this point I refuse to be led astray by what Mr. Hayward calls "the tragic impotence" of empirical Churches to act ethically. I know all about church failures and have suffered from some of them. Yet, I also know about many glorious successes and have been blessed by them. Whatever degree of faithfulness, of strength and weakness the empirical Churches manifest, they are still the world's best bet. Indeed, they are the world's only bet. I expect Mr. Hayward, himself, also believes this. Press on, then, discipling the families of mankind (*ta ethne*), educating and even goading them to ethical action. Unless, indeed, you believe that Buddhism, Communism, Hinduism or

Secularism is a better bet. In which case, go cast yourself, body and soul, into making Buddhists, Communists, Hindus or Secularists!

As to friend Hayward's last point, there is abundant proof that the Early Church, for perhaps fifteen years, was overwhelmingly Jewish. I discussed the matter in *Bridges of God*, in 1955. It would be out of place to duplicate the argument here. The Early Church was a one-race, one-caste Church. It could have been nothing else.

Today, also, most congregations are monoethnic and monocultural. They can be nothing else. This is part of the problem. Wherever several races live near each other, congregations must make special efforts to avoid the curse of racism. These efforts, however, lie in the area of sanctification and Christian education, not legislation. We must not try to short circuit the process by requiring, as a pre-condition of baptism, a degree of brotherhood which seems right to us. We must not put up extra-biblical barriers to entrance to the Christian life, no matter how desirable and attractive they seem: Men like to become Christians without crossing barriers and must be encouraged to do so. Christ will break the barriers down, and make us all fully brothers . . . but it may take some time.