Australian Baptist Churches and the Marginalisation of Ethnicity

In this chapter I introduce the need for a theology of ethnicity and ethnic diversity that is biblical and contextually engaged. I intend to demonstrate its relevance to the search for Australian ecclesial practices that are sensitive to issues of identity, integration, power, and the embrace of ethnic particularity.

“You’re not ethnic, you look like us!”

I arrived as an economic migrant in Australia on the 18th January 2012, arriving here on a 457 temporary residents’ visa. I’d travelled from the UK with the three other members of my family; all of them dual nationals. As a newly appointed member of faculty at the Baptist Theological College in NSW I rapidly settled in to the rhythm of teaching as the new semester got underway.

In the August of 2012, the annual gathering of Baptists in NSW and the ACT, “Revive”, was a great chance to get to meet new friends and colleagues from across the State. The workshop programme was typically varied and I picked one or two to fit around my coffee shop programme. A workshop on “Inclusivity” was on my list. In the workshop I discovered that Baptist churches were making great efforts to include females, young people, and the disabled and that this was also true of “many of the ethnic churches”. During the Q&A I queried this use of the term “ethnic church”, suggesting that we were all ethnic, that to use it solely of others was possibly a form of exclusion, and that actually it was very hard to imagine what a “non-ethnic church” would look like.

At the end of the workshop, feeling like I’d rained on the parade ground, an elderly lady approached me and told me that she understood what I was trying to say but that I was not ethnic because, “Well, you look like us!”

I was subsequently asked to preach at the annual Assembly of NSW/ACT in 2013 and took the opportunity to address ethnic diversity and gender equality. Some described it afterwards as “brave”; I simply saw it as an opportunity to say one or two obvious things that I believe are vital to the health of our Baptist movement.

Ethnic alterity: The ethnic “other”

The trend towards identifying some churches in Sydney as “ethnic” is the characteristic way of describing those Baptist churches which draw a majority of their members from particular ethnic backgrounds that are distinct from the white Australian majority (and presumably also seen by the same white Australian majority as distinct from the indigenous, Aboriginal Australian minority).

This usage is what social scientists label “alterity” (or “otherness”). In other words, ethnicity is something used to describe people who are “other” than ourselves. If “ethnic” always means somebody else, it means that they are not necessarily my responsibility and the “ethnic issue” will always remain somebody else’s problem; something that they have to learn to deal with.

Marginalising the experience of ethnicity

After my presentation at the annual 2013 Assembly I spoke with the white pastor of a Chinese Baptist Church in Sydney. Their story was fascinating and in a Facebook response to something I posted, they subsequently wrote,
Having worked in a Chinese Church for over 10 years, I was sometimes given the distinct impression by some Anglo-Christians that I had a less prestigious, second-class pastoral position, which would not have given me as valuable ministry experience as more “mainstream” churches. So-called ethnic churches in Australia are often looked down on as outside of whatever is happening in the “proper” churches.

The distress this causes me is probably shared by many other Baptists in NSW and the attitudes that generate these kinds of dismissive attitudes are familiar across the denominations. In 1996, Pope John-Paul II’s World Migration Day Message took the opportunity to remind Roman Catholics that such attitudes were unwelcome, for “in the Church no one is a stranger, and the Church is not foreign to anyone, anywhere”.

**The consequences of marginalising ethnicity**

Persisting with the usage of the category “ethnic church” has a number of unfortunate consequences. In particular, I’m convinced that,

- It will hinder the ability of Australian Baptist Churches to speak with clarity about our common Christian identity.
- We will continue to miss out on the mutually transformative process of integrating Baptists who are living in Australia as second- or third-generation migrants from non-Caucasian ethnic backgrounds.
- The existence and experience of the “ethnic church” will continue to be seen as marginal to the life of the various State Baptist Unions and, therefore, less valuable.
- The status of the “ethnic churches” will remain firmly in the category “foreign”, “transitional”, and “exotic”.

Of course it’s possible to build a case arguing that integrating ethnic diversity has many pragmatic advantages, but it also requires a theological response.

The first thing which must then be said is that theology has not simply been a distracting activity for academics and priests down through the centuries. It has been used to authenticate and validate a range of social policies and social institutions, from dictatorship to democracy, from monarchy to republicanism, from free-market capitalism to social democracy, from slavery to emancipation, as well as from apartheid to multiculturalism.

That’s why it’s so important to understand how and why theological positions have been adopted by theologians at various points in history. Christendom has its “shadow side” when it comes to its treatment of ethnic and cultural difference; so too does the Reformation.

In the context of our discussion it’s important to remain sensitive to the question of majority–minority relationships, especially to the discriminatory abuse of privilege, power, and authority when dealing with minority ethnic and cultural groups.

Oliver Buswell argues that racial *sic* discrimination is not simply an issue of skin colour but is a question of the determination of one group of people to dominate and subdue another.\(^2\) This requires a theological diagnosis and prognosis for the desire to dominate and subdue is fundamentally an issue of flawed and broken human nature. In short, it is an all-too-human sin.

**Established majority cultures protect institutional norms**

The use of certain forms of language can be a way of reinforcing norms. Referring to “Australian Baptist Churches and the Ethnic Churches” implies a mainstream and a margin.
Power always resides with the mainstream and preserving the status quo is the price of this particular form of idolatry. In contrast, renewal and innovation are typically characteristic of the margins.

I want my students at Morling College to understand that “culture” (and there are a myriad of definitions) is a product of ideas, artefacts, and institutions. Most analyses of culture focus only on the first two. The institution as a guardian of cultural norms has to be acknowledged if cultural and ethnic power and privilege are to be adequately taken into account.

As I have been pondering this question in the context of our own Association of Baptist Churches in NSW/ACT I’ve tried to reflect on what the Baptist “institution” in NSW/ACT has at stake in this issue. I’m still searching for an answer but, as a theological educator, I understand the need to recognise the new global realities. In the Morling classroom, I work hard to deal intentionally with our own ethnic diversity and multiculturalism. In this, I’ve taken a cue from others who are recognising that practical theologians, ethicists, historians, and other scholars of religion have all commented on the need for classrooms that honor [sic] multicultural perspectives (Kitano 1997). Most scholars today understand the value of a culturally sensitive classroom and may well devise syllabi that reflect the perspectives of different racial ethnic minority groups (Green and Stortz 2006). 3

I’d be the first to acknowledge that there’s a level of institutional self-preservation involved here. This simply recognises that theological institutions in today’s world cannot continue to act as if they were islands of Caucasian privilege. My archaically titled “EM308 Cross-cultural communication” classes are, I hope, laboratories involving inter-cultural participation and dialogue, rather than lectures describing the transfer of information by the representatives of one cultural group to the recipients of another.

Daniel Aleshire writes,

If theological schools don’t learn how to be effective educational institutions for racially and culturally diverse students and effective theological institutions for the communities they will serve, they will simply waste away as viable institutions by the end of this century. 4

Does God have a stake in ethnicity?

If my encounter with an ethnically blind workshop participant at Revive was the primary stimulus for this ongoing journey in theological reflection, the second stimulus was the following quote, stumbled across at an early stage of the journey.

...few missiologists are developing a theology of “ethnicity” itself. This task is becoming increasingly urgent because the demands of ethnicity will probably dominate the world’s agenda at least in the opening decades of the new millennium. 5

A biblical theology of ethnicity portrays it as the pinnacle of God’s creative acts (Gen 10:32), laments the consequent rebellion and hubris (Gen 11:4), declares it to lie within the scope of God’s missionary purposes (Gen 12:2-3), incorporates it into the body of Christ (Rev 7:9), and concludes with the eschatological worship of God, enriched by the contributions of ethnically diverse participants (Rev 19:15). Ambiguously, it’s possible to read the biblical narrative of ethnic diversity as both a consequence of human pride and as a consequence of divine creation. For example, we can note the following:
Ethnic and cultural diversity are a consequence of human rebellion

- In Genesis 11, the diversity imposed upon the nations is described as a judgement of God upon the peoples of Babel.

- In Exodus 1:1ff. Pharaoh “plays on the prejudices and fears of his own people to justify his own racist attitudes... the story of the exodus presents a classical example of racial conflict. It shows how racial prejudices lead to persecution and oppression, coupled with economic exploitation, and thus to forced migration”.

- Pentecost reverses the curse of diversity, overcoming mutual incomprehension and suspicion, and prophetically demonstrates the nature of God’s reign.

Ethnic and cultural diversity are a consequence of creation

- In Genesis 1 the command “Be fruitful and multiply” results in diversity among the nations and is seen as a consequence of God’s intention to bless the inhabitants of the earth.

- Karl Barth understood the “Table of nations” in Genesis 10 as the pinnacle of God’s creative acts. It’s possible to understand the nations as an aspect of God’s renewed promise to Noah’s children and grandchildren after the Flood.

- In Ruth 1:1ff. Ruth demonstrates the ethnic diversity that can exist within the nation of Israel. The book of Ruth portrays its central character as a non-Israelite who is prepared to embrace the religious convictions and customs of her mother-in-law, Naomi. A Moabite can find a place among the Semitic Jews — presumably we can imagine God smiling. Ruth’s story points to potential complexities, however. How does her religious conversion impact her sense of ethnic and cultural identity? The honest reader is left with the distinct feeling that intercultural integration sets the parameters for Ruth’s decision. Assimilation is neither sought nor urged. This is the free decision of a young Moabitess.

- Pentecost is an affirmation of ethnic and cultural diversity, relativising it in the light of the unifying Spirit of Pentecost. The reference to Pentecost is impossible to avoid in the context of relations between the different Christian traditions. In the account of Acts 2, the miraculous work of the Spirit enables each person present to hear the word of the apostles in their own mother tongue. The miracle can be understood to have affected either the speakers or the listeners. Either the apostles speak several languages at the same time or each person present hears the word of the apostles in their mother tongue.

- When a migrant arrives in a second country, he or she may decide to learn the language which is spoken there. At a certain point they manage to think in the language of the country, finally to dream in the new language. The language of faith is hidden deep inside in the ethnic identity of each person. In his Epistles, Paul is twice filled with wonder at being able to call God Abba, an expression of a similar form of spiritual and cultural intimacy.

- Eric Barreto makes the startlingly insightful comment that the gift of tongues in Acts 2 is not merely an act of divine simultaneous interpretation. The fact that simultaneous interpretation requires expert knowledge of the cultural assumptions and norms which shape language requires the work of the Holy Spirit to be a work of simultaneous and multiple inculturations: “the Holy Spirit accommodates and lives into the multiplicity of human language and culture”.

- The Pentecost narratives of Acts 2 contain the message that this diversity of language is not detrimental to communion within the church. In Acts 2 we can imagine the Spirit announcing “Here and now, the church is the gathering of women and men who
hear the gospel each in their own mother tongue”. We can extend this image to the relationship between our churches and pray for the Spirit to equip us to live in fraternal communion while allowing each of us a special place for the language, spirituality, theology, and cultural assumptions which enable us most to draw close to God in worship. It is not enough to confess that we believe in the universal church — it is necessary for us to live what we confess.

Concluding his discussion of the nations, Chris Wright notes that

The Bible does not imply that ethnic or national diversity is in itself sinful or the product of the Fall... God’s rule over the nations is simply a function of the fact that He created them in the first place.8

**Why is it important to frame ethnic diversity faithfully?**

As a missiologist, I work at the intersection of theology and the social or human sciences in order to better understand the manner in which the church lovingly initiates people into the community of Jesus the Messiah.

I am, for this reason, an applied theologian and am acutely sensitive to the cash-value of theology. To put it another way, theologies have legs. Theology has the capacity, in the hands of the powerful or influential, to mobilise collective and individual action in the name of Christ. The ends towards which theological energy is directed might include the call to volunteer for service in Christian mission or ministry, mobilising a voting public in democratic elections, driving the Christian contribution to public debate, and buttressing populist views that, on careful inspection, might be considered to have been far from Christian in their response to ethnic diversity. One of these immediately comes to mind.

**Theologies of creation and apartheid versions of ethnic diversity**

In 1829 the Presbytery of Cape Town of the Dutch Reformed Church (in South Africa) considered a question from its Somerset West congregation. They discussed whether persons of “colour” should be allowed to take Communion together with “born again Christians” (white people), or whether these people should take Communion separately.

The 1857 Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church (DRC) resolved that,

The Synod considers it desirable and according to the Holy Scripture that our heathen members (non-whites) be accepted and initiated into our congregations wherever it is possible; but where this measure, as result of the weakness of some, would stand in the way of promoting the work of Christ among the heathen people, then congregations set up among the heathen, or still to be set up, should enjoy their Christian privileges in a separate building or institution.9

Such debates and decisions paved the way for the establishment by the DRC in 1881 of the first racially separated church in South Africa, the Dutch Reformed Mission Church (DRMC) for “coloured” people. Next the DRC established the Dutch Reformed Church in Africa (DRCA) for black people and then the Reformed Church in Africa (RCA) for Indian people. In 1948 the National Party was elected on a platform of apartheid. Following the election, the DRC announced in its newspaper *Kerkbode*, “Apartheid is a Church Policy”.

A retrospective investigation of the apartheid theology of the DRC argues that the divisions were construed along openly ethnic lines, not theological ones. The DRC saw ethnic boundaries as creation ordinances that were considered immutable and required careful policing. The Dutch Calvinist Abraham Kuyper’s political theology of “spheres” of
sovereignty/authority was appealed to (he would probably have rejected this use of his theology) as a way of underlining separate development of the “nations”.

Apartheid theology was essentially about ethnicity and as such provided an example of the first typical relationship of religion and ethnicity, namely religion as constraining primordial force. 10

Anti-apartheid theology emphasised Christology and ecclesiology as integrating theological motifs which broke down unbiblical and sinful efforts at raising ethnic boundaries. Later multicultural statements, adding to these insights, have gone on to stress the diverse character of God’s kingdom, mission to all nations (Matt 28:19), hospitality (Rom 12:13; Matt 25:31–46), and reconciliation (2 Cor 5:16–20), among others.

However, it’s equally important to note the existence of forms of theology that have moved the discussion of ethnic diversity in a different direction to that listed above (and, we might add, to the earlier theological justifications of slavery).

**Trinitarian theologies and intercultural versions of ethnic diversity**

In 2007 the language and practice of “intercultural dialogue” was introduced into the European vocabulary. It heralded a route beyond the multicultural impasse. European theologians and church leaders responded with a vision of integration that went beyond coercion, assimilation, and cultural imperialism. An increasingly common theological discussion has centred on an emphasis upon the Trinitarian nature of God. Trinitarian theology offers a potential roadmap towards an integrated view of culture and ethnicity. For example,

The human experience of God as three-in-one suggests that unity in diversity is fundamental to reality and that the mission of God as Creator, redeeming Son and Holy Spirit is a multicultural mission: It is the loving dance of difference in unity, not a monoculture, that God seeks (Gen 1:26, Matt 28:19). 11

My own theological contribution has been to bring this discussion to bear on the human experience of migration, overlying the human experience of ethnic alterity.

Our missiological starting point begins with the trinitarian God who self-reveals, supremely in Jesus Christ, and who extends self-giving love towards the whole of creation, desiring and working towards its salvation and liberation from the corruption of sin and death. In this sense we understand God to be a missionary God, from where we derive an understanding of the *missio Dei*. This enables us to imagine a migrant God who wanders through the wilderness with his people. This is the same God who experiences exile, social marginalisation, and a sense of rootlessness in and through the incarnate life of Jesus. […] God’s nature, demonstrated in the movement between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, points to a level of [diversity and] integration within God’s own self that does not obscure essential differences. The Son is not the Father, but the love of the Son that leads to the Cross is the same love that the Father extends to the whole of creation.

The extension of God’s self-giving love towards the whole of creation implies that the *missio Dei* and the unity of humankind are indelibly linked together (Gen 1:26,27; 1 Cor 15:28; Col 1:19–20) and any discrimination between human beings is a violation of God’s own dignity. 12
Contextual theologies and the re-framing of ethnic diversity

After the 2005 Cronulla riots the Evangelical Alliance in Australia issued *Christ and Multiculturalism* which began with, “In the light of the community tensions exposed by the Cronulla experience there is one simple reason for re-affirming multiculturalism: it is an essential part of the gospel”.  

Brian Edgar’s paper argued for multicultural approaches on the basis of ecclesiology, creation, soteriology, Christology, baptism, pneumatology, and the kingdom of God. In other words, “One Lord, one faith, one Spirit, one baptism”. Edgar posed the contextual question for Australia, “Tolerance or active love?” and went on to insist that a multicultural vision involved an absence of cultural coercion or attitudes of ethnic superiority. Positively, it implied the presence of religious freedom, a willingness to work to enhance life for all people, and to celebrate the value located in each culture.

**Liberationist theologies**

Liberation theologies arose in response to political and military oppression and dictatorship in Latin America. These theologians stressed God’s “preferential option for the poor”, demonstrated most clearly in the example of Jesus. In some places this struggle has taken on an ethnic character: for example, *mestizo* Indians in Latin America dispossessed of land or property rights, first nation Americans, the Roma of Central Europe, the indigenous Sami people of Norway, the Inuit of Canada, and the Aboriginal people of Australia.

It follows that the only groups with which the church is obliged to establish a *working alliance* are the poor and the oppressed (in complete contrast with the usual church-state alliances found across the world). This may include the ethnically oppressed and those who are impoverished because they are ethnically discriminated against.

**Post-colonial theologies**

Post-colonial theologians read Scripture and address power relationships within the church and society from the perspective of the “subaltern”. Dalit theology from India and Diaspora theologies are good examples of post-colonial theologies.

Post-colonial theologians talk of freeing ethnic groups from colonial subjugation, including the colonisation of the mind (by which an ethnic group might come to believe the mythology or rhetoric of a more powerful group that its language or customs are “less civilised” or “heathen”, for example).

**Local theologies**

“Local” theologians reject the tendency of Western theologians to assume that their theology is universally true, irrespective of their Western context. Western theologians, in writing about theology being written elsewhere, have typically labelled it as “African”, “Asian”, or “Indigenous” theology. They have never applied this to their own writing, for example: “The Institutes of *French* Christian Religion” by Jean Calvin or “*Swiss* Church Dogmatics” by Karl Barth. Local theologians argue that all theology is contextual and therefore a reflection of/response to prevailing cultural factors. Some of them talk about the “priesthood of all cultures”.

Local theologians prefer to talk about “global” theology but they understand this to be the product of a dialogue of historically received universal theologies and currently emerging local theologies.

Christianity is a universalism which affirms the particular, unlike modernity (a universalism which denies the particular) and post-modernity (a set of particularisms which do not attain universality). …Evangelicalism’s
combination of universalism and particularity may be uniquely powerful in creating global community.15

Whose Lunar New Year is it?
At a more mundane level, getting ethnic diversity right is important. I worship at Epping Baptist Church, along with people from 29 different nationalities. Every year the church hosts a New Year dinner for over 300 church members, their families, and friends. It is not a Chinese New Year Dinner, it is our lunar New Year dinner. These things matter and our Chinese members are quick to resist any appearance of colonising a celebration shared, among others, with our Japanese, Malaysian, Thai, Vietnamese, and Korean church members.

Steps forward: Renewing Australian ecclesial practices from the margins
In the stumbling attempt to suggest the kinds of practical and concrete steps that our Baptist community can take, here are some suggestions for addressing the question of ethnic diversity in a more satisfactory way.

Begin the hard work of understanding and describing ethnicity
Dewi Hughes defines an “ethne” (in its French noun form) as a community with six common characteristics:

- It reflects a common proper name.
- It implies a myth of common ancestry.
- It evokes memories of a common history.
- It contains elements of a common culture.
- It provides a link with a common homeland.
- It suggests a sense of solidarity.

Secondly, Hughes suggests that “Ethnic groups that for various reasons, such as migration, are dispersed in a state that is remote from their homeland are called ‘ethnic minorities’”.

Thirdly, “a ‘nation’ is a territorially concentrated ethnic group. Where nations have been oppressed or marginalized in their ancestral territory they are called ‘national minorities’ or ‘indigenous peoples’.” In light of this, Hughes argues that the majority of nation-states have a plurality of ethnes.16

Commit to understanding ethnic diversity in contemporary Australian Baptist identity
In attempting to try to understand the various forms that ethnic diversity takes in Australia, I want to suggest that there remains the need to more clearly define and illustrate at least the following five categories (there may be more):

a. Societal inter-ethnic diversity (where society is composed of more than one ethnic community)
b. Societal intra-ethnic diversity (where society is composed of multiple and hybrid ethnic communities)
c. Communal intra-ethnic diversity (where the ethnic community is composed of multiple and hybrid ethnicities)
d. Familial inter-ethnic diversity (where the family includes individuals from more than one ethnic community)
e. Personal intra-ethnic diversity (where a family member has parents — or claimed ancestry — from more than one ethnic community).

A key question currently facing Australian Baptist Churches is the question, “When will today’s ecclesial ethnic diversity become a commonplace part of tomorrow’s ecclesial ethnic
unity?” In other words, when and how will mainstream Baptist life be understood as ethnically diverse and when will it be possible to acknowledge that, “We’re all Australian Baptist Churches now”? There are certainly authentic African, Korean, and Chinese spiritual traditions, just as there is an Australian spiritual tradition. However, none of those traditions is fixed and intercultural experience and engagement leave none of them untouched.

Throughout this section I have been talking about “us”. This is a necessarily and collectively autobiographical conversation. In discussing ethnic diversity I am not describing some constructed “other”. However, I recognise that this necessarily exists in something of a tension with the missionary idea of “The Church’s missionary calling of being other-centered rather than being self-centered… as the theological foundation for a conciliatory existence”. 17

The church has to move beyond being mere community and learn the discursive practices of dialogue and debate. The language of integration can only be a source of renewal if the community into which it is introduced is a discursive community. This implies mutuality and the potential transformation of all parties in the dialogue. If the community is not thoroughly discursive, the language of integration will never move beyond the practice of mere assimilation.

**Commit to embracing ethnic diversity within contemporary Australian Baptist experience**

The church in Antioch is a powerful reminder that, before Paul was able to articulate the egalitarian sentiment of Galatians 6:23, he had to experience ecclesial and missional practices that witnessed to the essential unity of the human race in Christ. The missional innovation of Acts 11:19–30 is clear enough: Africans and Cypriots witness to Greeks. The ecclesial innovation is equally clear: the church and its leadership are ethnically diverse. The Paul of Acts 11 is clearly a long way from the Paul of Galatians 6:23 and the transformation of his own missional understanding and practice is his experience of learning from anonymous missionaries who saw the non-determinative nature of ethnic particularity.


John Toews simply assumes Jewish ethic identity and legitimates this by reference to the historical reality of Jewish ethnicity: “Ethnic identity is function of history”. 18 He concedes that “‘In Christ’ Jews remain Jews and Gentiles remain Gentiles” yet posits the church as a “third race”, the “body of Christ” in which “ethnic identity is a legitimate historical and sociological reality”. 19

The majority of contemporary scholars are critical of the idea of a universalising “non-ethnic” ethos in the New Testament, seeing this as an unhelpful avoidance of the fixity and fluidity that fails to take us far beyond the Greek–Jew–Roman triad of the Acts of the Apostles. For example, Barreto argues that,

Luke does not imagine the creation of a new ethnicity of Christians; instead, he projects an interstitial ethnic space between the competing and overlapping ethnic claims of Jews, Romans, Greeks, and the other peoples that populate the pages of Acts. Luke does not erase ethnic difference but employs the flexible bounds of ethnicity in order to illustrate the wide reach of the early church movement. 20

Barreto concludes with a vision of an ethnically diverse church that is disarming honest about the human tendency towards exercising “leverage” over others.
Both Christianity and Judaism in antiquity traded on the cultural leverage that ethnic discourse provides. Moreover, both recognized that the negotiation of our ethnic differences is an irreplaceable component of our social fabric.\(^{21}\)

He continues by advocating for

four basic principles that might guide our theological reflection around these important but difficult issues:

1. race and ethnicity are unavoidable;
2. race and ethnicity are indispensable;
3. race and ethnicity are a gift from God;
4. race and ethnicity shape profoundly our reading of Scripture.\(^{22}\)

The purpose for including this material here is to provide a point of biblical and theological reflection that reminds us that we cannot bypass discussions of our ethnic identities and our ethnic diversity by simply pretending that they do not exist or that it does not matter now that we are “all one in Christ”.

**The renewal of ecclesial identity from the marginal experience of ethnic alterity**

The margins can only transform the mainstream where Australian Baptists have become discursive communities, allowing space for diversity and dialogue.

Several simultaneous acknowledgements are required:

- The adjective “Australian” must be used of all churches on this continent.
- The adjective “Ethnic” must be used of all churches on this continent. Our churches must own both of these labels if we are to more adequately address the issue of our ethnic diversity. Until we do so, ethnicity will always be somebody else’s problem — usually those who are of darker skin.
- That we, until we arrive at a more comfortable accommodation of Australian Baptist identity to our ethnic diversity, follow Hughes and use the more statistically accurate “ethnic minority churches”.\(^{23}\)
- We develop ways of talking about ethnicity within the Christian community that are eschatologically shaped — perhaps “fulfilled ethnicity”, “transformed ethnicity”, or “eschatological ethnicity” — and work towards filling out these categories with theologically and pragmatically rich meaning and experience.

Ethnic diversity can become a casualty of narrowly conceived, nationalist communities precisely because it is not allowed to participate in the mainstream discourse. Only a thorough-going dialogical process that disavows the use of certain mythical narratives and discourse, which includes ethnically diverse participants, and which reflects ethnic diversity at all levels of Baptist life, will enable us to move beyond the current unhappy state of referring to our “Australian Baptist Churches” and our “Chinese Baptist Churches”. What the apostle Paul discovered in the church at Antioch (Acts 11:19–30) and then went on to articulate in writing to the churches in Galatia (Gal 6:22–23) remains a pertinent point of theological reflection on our shared life together in the community of Jesus’ disciples.

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\(^1\) FaceBook post, 19th March 2014. I have chosen not to reveal the contributor’s identity.

3 See, for example, Byron, G.L., “Race, Ethnicity, and the Bible: Pedagogical Challenges and Curricular Opportunities”, in *Teaching Theology and Religion*, 15, no.2, April (2012), 8.


18 Toews, J., “Paul on Ethnicity” in *Direction* 17, no.1, Spring (1988), 79.

19 Toews, J., “Paul on Ethnicity” in *Direction* 17, no.1, Spring (1988), 80.


