

## **Cross-cultural Learning - Issues of the second generation of immigrant churches**

*Michael Kisskalt*

In my report about the situation of immigrant churches in the German Baptist Union (see below, under Baptist Ministries in Europe) I state that we confront today the challenge of the internationalisation of our society. This internationalisation is also visible within our German churches. The real challenge comes not from the students and business people of the foreign countries who belong as guests to German Baptist churches for limited amounts of time, but from the refugees and immigrants who have settled in Germany and have founded enormous numbers of monoethnic churches in the last twenty years. Waves of refugees have come into our society and have formed churches and church groups according to their language and culture in order to have a kind of cultural refuge in the foreign context. Nowadays, ten or twenty years later, these church planters have children who have grown up in German kindergardens, in German schools with German friends. What about this second generation, these children of African, Asian or other cultural origins, who are living between two cultures: the culture of their parents and the culture of their contemporary context?

## **A problem of concern**

Some weeks ago, I was in an African church in a town in the Ruhr-area with about 200 people attending the service. When the time came for the children to leave the service for their Sunday school activities, about 100 children left the room and with them two adults who were responsible for the Sunday school. Seeing that I asked myself a lot of questions: How can the two people handle this many children, their questions and interests, their energy and mobility? What value do children have in this church, in the culture of these Christians? Is work with children, is this responsibility of high value or is it not very important? After the service, I spoke with the elders of the church about these questions, and they conceded that they have neglected working with children and young people in the church. Now that they have observed that some of their adolescents are leaving the church, they have decided to take this work more seriously.

Last year, in the annual meeting of the leaders of international churches, the network-groups and the president of our Union, we discussed youth work in church. We especially discussed the Hispanic churches trying to establish relationships with the German Baptist Youth work. These relationships are useful for young Germans, as they feel inspired by Hispanic spirituality, but also helpful to the young Hispanics who are grateful to the Germans who help them to acculturate into the German context. However, in contrast to the attitude of the Hispanics, the Tamil leaders expressed their suspicion towards the youth work of German Baptist churches which seems to be more “liberal” than based on sound Bible study. The reason for this suspicious prejudice may be in the interactive style with some modern pedagogic elements in the German youth work, whereas in Tamil youth groups Bible teaching plays a larger role.

### **“Intercultural Kids”**

These discussions led us, the “International Mission in Germany” (a branch of the German Baptist Union with the task of accompanying the international churches in the context of our Union), to the decision to organize in March 2006 a conference for international churches on the issue of “Intercultural Kids” in Germany. About 50 participants of many different nations and cultures took part at this conference on the 17<sup>th</sup> of March in Frankfurt. Of highest interest was the fact that not only adult co-workers discussed this subject, but also about ten young Africans out of the Ruhr-area were involved who spoke the regional German slang. They talked about their internal tensions being torn between the African world at home and in church and the German world at school and in the streets. They identify more with the residential German context than with the African. This tendency has led to conflicts with their parents who do not speak German to the children trying to maintain some elements of their African culture at home and in church. No wonder that, at the conference in Frankfurt, the discussions about culture turned more and more into an intergenerational debate between younger and elder participants. Young Afro-German Christians, born and grown up in Germany, socialised in Germany feel alienated from the monoethnic African churches. On the other hand, when they see their skin is black they know that they are not of German origin. Until the age of about 17, they were not aware of this fact. They felt themselves to be Germans just like their German friends. But approaching the higher school qualifications, they felt the growing spirit of competition in their classes, hearing more and more racist words against them. They feel themselves to be Germans, but they cannot deny their African origin. Thus they call themselves “Afro Germans”. But as their cross-cultural conflict is not resolved by inventing words, they suggest living on a third cultural level: German Christians and African

Christians can meet together on the level of a Christian culture which transcends both terrestrial cultures.

**Thus this was the preliminary result of the conference:**

1. The cross-cultural conflict of the second generation of immigrants has become a cross-generational conflict within the cultures.
2. The suggestion that all human cultures meet within a “neutral” Christian culture.

## **Can Christians put off their culture and should they?**

Even if I empathise with the praiseworthy proposal of the young Africans at the Conference in Frankfurt, I am afraid that the idea of a transcendent Christian culture is very theoretic and not quite possible to realize. Although Christians, we are not angels, spiritual beings, lifted up above creation realities, but we are and we remain human beings with our history and our culture of which we cannot get rid. Our culture is not only an unworthy, disturbing ballast. The first chapters of the Bible (Gen. 4:17-22; 5:1-32; 10:1-32) describing the original history of humankind tell us about nations and cultures and professions set by God the creator. Our cultural hue is, on the one hand, part of the good creation of God and, on the other hand, interwoven with our sinful existence. Thus, we have a critical view of it, because our culture is corrupted by sin, but we also say “Yes” to our culture as part of our created life.

If God were against our historical and cultural existence, he would not have come in Christ as a human being on earth, among us, as our brother. He might have chosen the (Muslim) way to reveal the truth in a spiritual or doctrinal way floating above us, but he did not. He sanctified our terrestrial cultural life in becoming one of us. Therefore we need not throw away

our cultural character. We have to recognize and to accept it, in the name of Jesus Christ. The Christian way to cope with our culture is to thank God for our history, for the heritage of our parents and ancestors and to daily bring our lives under the cross of Jesus-Christ, to repent of our sinful words and deeds and thoughts, also born out of our culture.

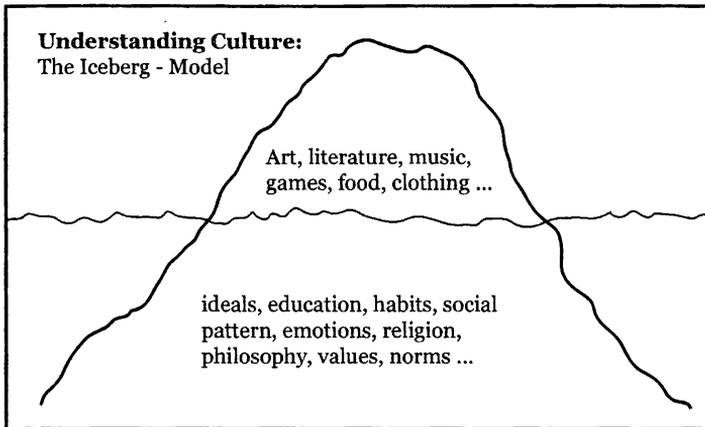
In conclusion, Christians as human beings are cultural beings, they cannot shed their cultural baggage, and, despite several false cultural developments, they need not get rid of it as God has sanctified human culture both in his creation of the world and humankind and in his salvific act in Christ. Therefore we have to understand cultural issues and cultural developments and realize that humanity is not driven by cultural streams and flavours as if cultural developments are hazardous events. There are ways of cultural learning, but for that we must understand culture.

### **Understanding culture**

The cultural existence of humanity is a very complex issue, described and explained in many different models. I chose two models of culture that point, first, to the difference of visible and invisible elements of culture and, second, to the influence of the different levels of culture.

#### **The Iceberg-Model**

The most widely known model of culture is the Iceberg-Model. The iceberg is not only the top that is visible on the surface of the sea, but much more the bottom which is hidden under the surface reaching deeply into the water. The movement of the iceberg depends more on the sea streams that touch the bottom of the iceberg and drive it along in its direction than on the visible part of the iceberg which may be influenced by incidental weather influences. The proper weight and form of the iceberg is based on its hidden bottom.



The cultural existence of humankind can be compared to the iceberg-model. There are some cultural elements that are visible in human customs, in art and literature, in music and games, in clothing and food. This morning we made some jokes at the breakfast table when we saw the difference in ways of eating bread. We saw the German way of cutting the roll, putting butter on it and then sausage or marmelade, and the French way of breaking the roll and dipping it into the marmelade on the plate or into the coffee. We discover it in the way in which some Europeans cover themselves at night in a loose way, with a double comfort filled with feathers, but others do so with a blanket whose edges are tucked firmly under the mattress of the bed. Some cultural elements are visible, and by them, we can easily discover some of the differences among us. But more essential are the cultural differences which are hidden: the ideals, the values, the norms, the habits, the social patterns, emotions, philosophy and religion ... These elements, grown during hundreds of years in a certain ethnic context, have more influence on our lives than we are aware of. The invisible elements of culture cause or influence the visible elements of culture. Therefore it is not surprising that it is so difficult to understand a foreign culture because its essentials are hidden.

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Thus, the iceberg-model explains that to understand a culture you must look deeper, but the iceberg-model cannot show the ways in which hidden cultural elements influence visible elements. Therefore we will examine a second model of cultures which I want to call the onion-model.

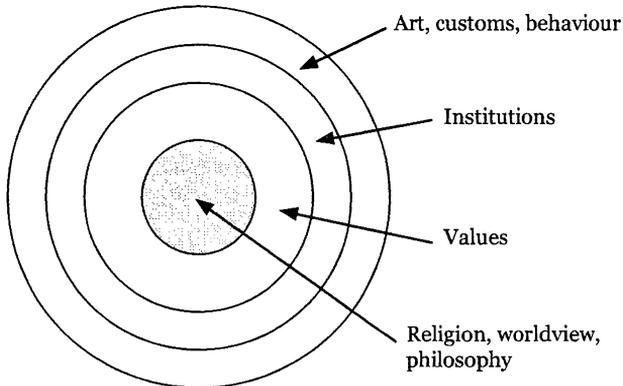
### **The Onion-Model**

I will follow in my presentation the explanations of Linwood Barney (1973) and the way he perceived the interweaving of culture, values and religion, according to his experiences as a missionary in Papua-Guinea. He differentiates between four levels of culture, between the more exterior and the more interior influences. The most exterior level of culture is visible in the arts and customs of an ethnic group. These utterances are due to the institutions which the ethnic group has developed: How do they understand and organize, for example, marriages, their societal structures, their justice system? These central utterances of culture in its institutional forms may be reflected in the external forms of arts and culture. But culture in its institutions develops from the values which have become predominant in an ethnic group. What are the predominant values in organising, for example, life between man and woman or between the generations? The value of individuality in Western Europe led to certain forms of democracy which are unthinkable in certain African societies deeply influenced by the value of communal life including the respect and obedience of the younger generation toward the elder generation. The reasons for these different cultural utterances are based on different values of life: On the one side, human beings are defined in a very individual and intellectual way, on the other side, human beings are defined in their belonging to the communal hierarchy. Therefore cultural learning must understand the values of culture; if not, we can neither really understand our culture nor the culture of the foreigner.

Linwood Barney goes one step further in saying that the innermost cultural level of humankind is its religion or its worldview. Values are born out of a certain life philosophy: How do we understand history, how do we explain good and evil, how do we define ourselves in the space of our life? According to the answers given by our ancestors over many centuries, ethnic groups develop their beliefs about gods, nature, their patterns of decision making and so on. Might it be true that the most internal core of culture is religion? I am not yet certain, but it may be true. If it is true, no wonder that a real change of religion takes so much time, sometimes two or three generations. People can adopt certain customs, they can even install certain institutions, but much time is required for a real change of values. The change of a worldview often takes years or decades, even if someone has begun to pray to the Christian God, having the name of Jesus on their lips.

**Understanding Culture: The Onion-Model**

G. Linwood Barney: *The Supracultural and the Cultural. Implications of Frontier Missions*; in: R. Pierce Beave (ed.), *The Gospel and Frontier People*, Pasadena, 1973.



I do not want to discuss whether Barney is right in differentiating between values and religion. Of importance is the fact that the heart of culture will be found in the worldview and in the values of an ethnic group. The way to discover this core of culture is a long and curvy one. When immigrants come into our European countries, we must understand not only their external but also their internal quarrels. The immigrants of the first generation cannot change their mindset just like that. It takes time and patience to acculturate into a foreign culture. Later, we will come back to this point. In the next section we will take a more intensive view on the values which are not only static dogmatic phrases. Values are closely linked to certain behavioural patterns which might make the communal life of different cultures difficult.

### **Cultural Categories**

We already mentioned certain issues concerning the values of culture. But in this context, I would like to present the research of Geert Hofstede (1991) done in the 70s, who examined differences in corporate culture between the different locations of IBM on the different continents, despite the equal educational background of the co-workers and despite the fact that the directors of IBM tried to standardize work procedures in all locations. After having evaluated many interviews and questionnaires, he summarized his results in formulating four categories of culture: (1.) Power distance, (2.) Uncertainty avoidance, (3.) Individualism/collectivism, (4.) Masculinity/femininity, and later he added a fifth one (5.) Time orientation. At the end, he defined culture as the “collective software of mindset” which identifies the members of one group in how they differ from the members of another group.

1. The **power distance** describes how far a society accepts the fact that the power in institutions and organisations is shared in an unequal way. How is hierarchy in a group organised? How does a group come to decisions? Is there one person who decides or is the decision based on a group process?
  
2. The **uncertainty avoidance** describes how far a society feels threatened in unclear situations. Which rules and measures does the group develop to avoid uncertainties? How ready are the members of a group to take a risk? How many details and eventualities must be discussed before decisions are made? How much space is left for improvisation or hazard?
  
3. **Individualism / Collectivism** describes how far a society is a loose framework for individuals or how far the individuals are tied to communal structures? What role does the family play?
  
4. **Masculinity / Femininity** describes how far gender is decisive for the social role of men and women in society.
  
5. **Time orientation** describes how far a society, in its decisions, is based on traditions and experiences. How far does it orient its decisions more on the short-term or on the long-term results? What are the decisive criteria for decisions: Is it a look at the past, the present or the future?

Some criticise the categories of Hofstede saying that his categories are not complete. I would join these critics in adding the category of the communication style. I want to add this category because, especially in contact with immigrants, this is a point at which I discover a real challenge. How do members of a group communicate to each other? Who are the decisive

persons or what are the decisive media? Gestures and body language, the words between the lines are often extremely important. When, for example, an American in greeting says: "How are you?" he does not expect the profound answer that a European would like to give to such a question. In this instance what seems to be a question is actually a way of saying "Good Morning" or "Good Afternoon", and not a real question at all. I will give another example of the importance of communication in daily life which shows that the best idea has no value if it cannot be communicated in a proper way. During my stay in Cameroon, I learned, for example, that the Cameroonian does not say "no" when he wants to deny something. He uses many words to describe his "no", but he does not say it outright. Inversely, to receive a "no" from another person signifies for him a real insult. I learned also, that the medium for communication is not paper or email or sessions with topics, but the real place for communication, even about very serious and busy affairs, is the communal event of the feast.

### **Cultural patterns – a case study**

In order to recognise the behavioural categories based on certain cultural values it is essential that native and immigrant Christians come together. I remember a Ghanaian Baptist church in a German town gathering in the chapel of a German Baptist church. Responsible leaders of both communities decided to meet each other in the hope of growing in brotherly communion. The first step was to integrate the Africans as a special church group into the German church. The pastor, his wife and two or three others became members of the German Church. The German and the Ghanaian pastor met regularly, the Germans invited the Ghanaian pastor into the church leadership sessions. And German church members invited Africans into their homes. But because of the lack of a common

language it was difficult to communicate, and the difficult trials of communication sometimes ended in deep confusion, especially when the German hosts asked their African guests: Where do you come from? Why are you in Germany? What are you doing here? Where are you staying now? ... The Germans did not have ulterior motives in asking such questions. They were trying to show interest in their African sisters and brothers. But all these questions were the typical suspicious questions of the immigration office that wanted to find reasons to push the immigrants out of the country. The Africans were shocked; they did not answer and were looking for gentle ways to get out of the house.

Another example from these churches: The African congregation collected quite a lot of money to buy a bus for transporting the Africans from the refugee homes to the meetings of the Ghanaian church. But they did not know where to put the money they had collected. Finally the pastor kept the money at home under his mattress. They never once thought of opening a bank account for the money. First, because the pastor did not yet have the legal status of a recognised refugee and could not have done so. Second, because in Africa these Ghanaians were used to hiding their money in their homes and not putting it in banks. When the German treasurer heard about this situation, he became furious. Not because he accused the African of misusing the money. But he did not want to have some hidden money in the church which did not appear in the bookkeeping. The German values are clarity and correctness, especially in financial affairs. But the Ghanaians were afraid that the German bookkeeper would “eat” their money. They wanted to see their money, not in the form of numbers on a paper, but as “real” money. The German has confidence in impersonal bookkeeping and bank structures; the African has confidence in authority persons like the pastor. Not to leave the money with the pastor would have meant to mistrust him. After some weeks, this misunderstanding became a hard conflict

between the two churches. Both accused each other of having a bad attitude. Visiting them, I had to tell them that the behaviour and reactions of both sides were rooted in cultural realities with diverse values and behavioural patterns. You have to understand these patterns in order to avoid hurting misunderstandings.

### **Torn between two cultures**

If we refer this knowledge about cultures and the importance of their values and behavioural patterns to the challenges for the second generation of immigrants, we might understand the tensions in which they must find their way - torn between the values and behavioural patterns of their parents, which are also the guidelines in the monoethnic churches, and the norms and social patterns in the new home country. Fortunately, cultural patterns are not stable, fixed things. Culture is always on the move, influencing other cultures and being influenced by them. The history of people all over the world has been driven forward by the influence of strange cultures. There are times when certain cultures are stronger, and other times when these cultures lose their weight. It is interesting that cultures in the situation of danger have the tendency to delimitate themselves against others to preserve their identity. Whereas strong cultures can more easily open up to foreign cultural influences.

Immigrants are in this weak position. The first generation of immigrants tends to protect its cultural identity against its "hostile" environment. The existence of the immigrants coming freshly from abroad into our countries is in just such a risky situation. They have been uprooted from their cultural context, homeless and anxious. We must take this risky situation very seriously and handle it in a gentle and comprehensive way. Even when I was a missionary in Cameroon, it was a wonderful, strengthening experience to be together with people of my culture. I was willing to acculturate into the Cameroonian culture,

because I wanted to build up a valuable, contextual theological education program for pastors for the French speaking Cameroonian Baptist Union (Union des Eglises Baptistes du Cameroun). But I was so happy once a month to be in Douala and take part in the German feasts, to eat “Kartoffelsalat” and “Würstchen” and to play German games. The Cameroonians smiled about this behaviour but they understood it. They knew about the importance of being aware of one’s roots. Only those who know their roots can acculturate in a sound way. And it is true; I have never felt so consciously German as in the foreign land of Cameroon.

## **Development of immigrant churches**

Therefore, the immigrants coming into our countries have the right to establish their own, monoethnic churches. They cannot integrate in a few weeks, months or even years into our German churches. It is important that there be bridges so that they do not live in cultural isolation. The challenge is that our native churches help them to live their identity but also help them to open themselves up to the new context. Both movements are necessary. On the one hand, it is wrong to have idealistic expectations in the sense that the immigrants integrate quickly. On the other hand, it is wrong to maintain a suspicious distance to these churches in the sense of protecting ourselves from their strange influence. The best way is to accept them as they are and to look for possibilities for common activities: helping to learn the language, meeting for common Bible studies, celebrating feasts together. The strangers and the natives need each other to go forward and to discover the image of God in the other.

The monoethnic churches of the first generation need intercultural contacts. These contacts depend on the success of this bridge-building, whether these churches open up to an integration process which may last many decades, perhaps for

two generations. Even if many monoethnic churches of the first immigrant generation sometimes have multiethnic tendencies, i.e. being open for people close to their original ethnic character or of the same language group<sup>1</sup>, the real step to multiethnic openness takes place in the second generation. As the children of these immigrants, who now constitute the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation who have grown up in Germany, feel much more tied to the German culture than their parents do, they live through a real time of crisis and of fighting for a new cultural identity. These individuals become bridge-builders to the culture in which their parents immigrated. Going through crises of adolescence, they frequently distance themselves from the culture of their parents glorifying, perhaps too strongly, the culture of their non-parental context. Even if they feel torn between two cultures having both openness and a critical attitude toward each, they surely become ambassadors of both cultures. This cross-cultural existence may change in the 3<sup>rd</sup> generation of immigrants when the children of the 2<sup>nd</sup> generation develop a more critical attitude toward the culture where they were born and are living. Children of the 3<sup>rd</sup> generation may fall into a cultural paradigm crisis, either longing back for the original, “better” culture of their grandparents, or rejecting it definitely. Thus, either they fall back into the monoethnic pattern of their ancestors in the foreign land, living in monoethnic churches, in distance to the culture around them<sup>2</sup>, or they push the integration process forward, becoming active members of national church unions with a mixed congregation of national and immigrant background. It is no secret that monoethnic churches in Europe are quite attractive for Europeans who are disappointed by their churches and prefer to attend or join ethnic churches. People who join monoethnic churches although they are not of the same ethnicity are looking for God and new spiritual experiences in the “strange” monoethnic churches in their country.

## **Steps of cross-cultural integration**

In living with the immigrant churches around us, we must be aware of these steps of development. Moralizing and arguing on the native and on the immigrant side does not make sense, but we must find an emotional level to come together.<sup>3</sup> We must be patient, not indifferently but in an attitude of interest. In the same way, we must be ready to live with immigrants through the generations required for enculturation, to engage with them, to share mutually our lives, our fears and hopes. Which steps of integration must we be aware of?

To answer this question, I refer to the developmental model of intercultural sensitivity of Milton J. Bennett (1993:29). He differentiates between ethnocentric stages of development and ethnorelative stages. Immigrants and the receiving population in the first cross-cultural encounter period have to pass by the ethnocentric stage of denial that causes them to isolate themselves from the strange, other culture. They may move from an attitude of defence, despising the others and maintaining the superiority of the own culture (or in an inverse tendency maintaining the incomparable inferiority of their own culture), to the stage of minimising cultural differences hovering on a transcendent universalism which denies the importance of cultural questions. The 2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrants of our German Conference with their wish to meet on the third level of a Christian culture find themselves at this stage which signals already the end of the ethnocentric attitude. They have already moved to the ethnorelative stage of acceptance, adaptation and integration. On the level of acceptance people respect each other in their differences (of behaviour and values) not yet moving away from their own cultural identity. This movement of adaptation in the forms of empathy and pluralism is inclined to go to the stage of integration which includes a sound awareness of its own culture but also the capacity to accentuate different cultural patterns in different cultural contexts.

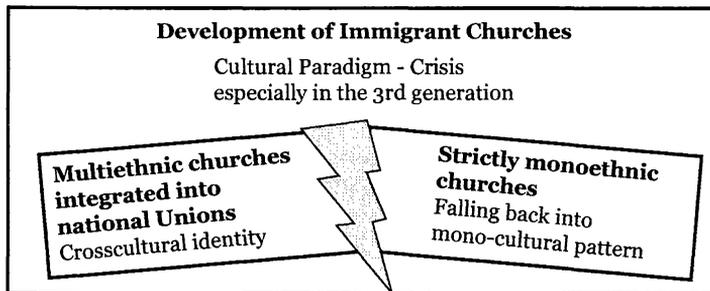
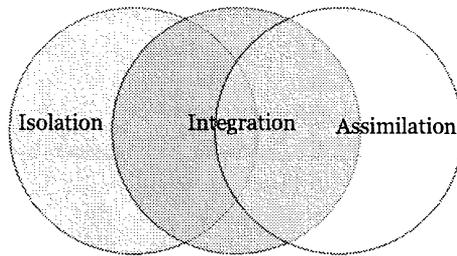
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We should not think that native and immigrant people take these steps in a strict linear movement forward. There may be times when they move forward, there may be times when they step back onto a lower stage. We must be aware of the fact that these very human observations and developments do not only concern immigrants but also people of the receiving culture. In all these turnings, we have the goal of a sound integration not pleading for a long stay on ethnocentric stages, but looking for ways to develop toward the ethnorelative stages.

### **The way of integration between isolation and assimilation**

The goal of integration is always oscillating between isolation and assimilation. The periods of development of cross-cultural integration know both tendencies: Isolation has its time and assimilation has its time.



The term “assimilation” is often used in a negative sense: It means the adaptation to the dominant culture of the environment with the tendency to deny one’s own cultural roots and elements. Every cross-cultural development knows this assimilation process. It is indeed negative when a culture is resigning its own practices and values in the face of the powerful surrounding culture. On the other hand, every culture needs movements of adaptation in order to stay relevant to its agents. But this tendency of assimilation needs the counter-movement of “isolation” to strengthen its identity against the dominant cultures around. When a cross-cultural process moves in a positive way, the two tendencies of isolation and of assimilation find their time and space.

### **Development of Immigrant Churches**

1st generation	Monoethnic churches	Intercultural contacts
2nd generation	Monoethnic churches becoming multiethnic	cultural conflicts tendency: integration
3rd generation (Crisis)	(Two opposite ways)	(Two opposite ways)

But neither isolation nor assimilation is the goal of this process; the aim of all cross-cultural efforts is the mutual integration of immigrants and indigenous people.

With all these observations, I want to encourage every participant of this conference to be patient with oneself and with the immigrants in our context. It is not in the intention of the Gospel of Jesus to cover all cultural differences and tensions with a pseudo-spiritual blanket. Our vision is the people of God wandering to the mountain of Zion, people of all cultures and nations, adoring the coming king Jesus, complaining of our injuries and failures, quarrelling about the right way to live and to believe, receiving day by day the forgiving grace of God. As children of God, as Christians, we are human beings on the way, and therefore we must be aware of human processes amongst

# Ethnic Churches in Europe

*A Baptist Response*





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