

As a Pastor, I prayed for a heterogeneous church, a group of believers that was a microcosm of the church universal. If persons from all walks of life, cultures, races, church affiliations, and doctrinal divergencies make up the true Body of Christ, I explained to my congregation, why could we not in one local church have the same diversity so that the world would know that what ties us together is our love for Him and each other? Together we prayed for the Lord to give us a diverse people who would find their unity in Jesus Christ. We chose as our motto, "Whom Christ receives, let not the Church reject."

Recently, I have read literature from the Church Growth Movement and discovered that what God called us to do, church growth leaders say cannot be done successfully. Years of painstaking research in growing and non-growing churches around the world, has yielded some basic principles commonly agreed upon by Christian sociologists in the field of church growth. One such principle is this:

A vital sign of a healthy, growing church is that its membership is composed of basically one kind of people. Even in church, birds of a feather flock together. And in church growth terminology, this is called the 'homogeneous unit principle.' Its classic expression is people like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic or class barriers.

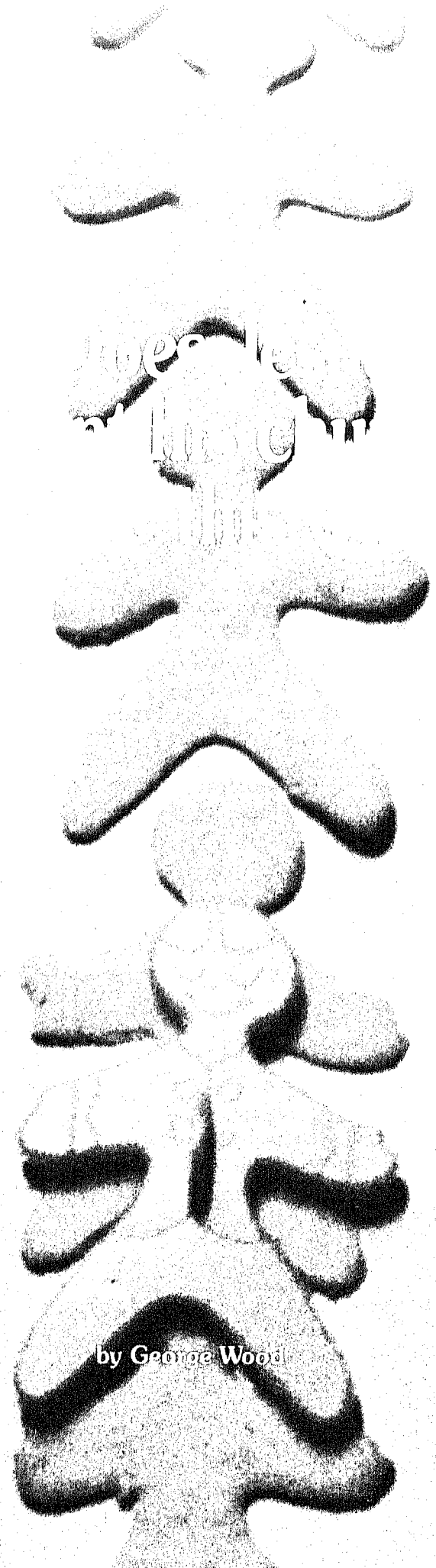
A homogeneous unit is simply a group of people who consider each other to be 'our kind of people.' They have many areas of mutual interest. They share the same culture. They socialize freely. When they are together they are comfortable and they all feel at home.

Of all the scientific hypotheses developed within the church growth framework, this one as nearly as any approaches a 'law.' A decade and a half of research dealing with numerous cultures in virtually every corner of the world confirms that the churches most likely to grow are those which bring together in the local fellowship those of a single homogeneous unit.

[C. Peter Wagner, *Your Church Can Grow* (Glendale, CA, 1976), pp. 110-111]

Put simply, this means persons with similar prejudices will group together. Don't try to reach Archie Bunker if you're not an Archie Bunker church. Churches on the right side of the tracks will have little success in reaching people on the wrong side. Churches with a high percentage of laboring people should not try to reach the university crowd and vice versa. The idea is that the church should provide a safe social environment where people can feel at home with others just like themselves.

I have one problem with this sociological assumption: *Does Jesus really want His Church to be that way?* Does he desire narrowness or breadth in His body? Would He be more pleased if we shed our prejudices or kept them? Would He be happier if



by George Wood

we only made friends with those like us, or if we practiced love toward others different from us? Would He have us sit down only with the righteous, or also with sinners? Would He want us to be in fellowship only with those who look like us, think like us, act like us or would He want us to have an open heart, an open mind, and an open hand to all within His Family? Frankly, I believe diversity thrills the heart of Jesus. Consequently, in our church we have extended to all the word of Jesus, "Come unto me."

Our Church seeks not a specialized ministry to one age group or even a few age groups. To babies, children, teens, college students, young adults, adults, the middle-aged, the over middle-aged, the senior citizen, in the name of Jesus, we say, "Come." How expansive to be a part of a church where one can find in the Lord, grandparents and grandchildren, parents and children, brothers and sisters. I pray for a far more effective ministry to every individual in the span of generations within our church.

Our church seeks not a specialized ministry only to the married or the single. To the never married, the formerly married, the widowed; to partners with parents and parents without partners; to the newly married, the married for some time, and the married for a long time; to parents with children and couples without children, in the name of Jesus, we say, "Come."

Our church seeks not a specialized ministry along denominational lines. To those with and those without a church background, in the name of Jesus, we say, "Come." Come Catholics. Come Protestants. Come Orthodox. Come Jews. Come all. Come to Jesus. Come to One another. "Let us maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace . . . until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the son of God." (Eph. 4:3, 13)

Our church seeks not to separate believers from one another on doctrinal questions that all fair-minded Christians acknowledge are not essential to salvation. Believing that the unity of the Spirit precedes the unity of faith (doctrine), we welcome eternal securitists and non-eternal securitists; pre-tribulationists, mid-tribulationists, post-tribulationists, and pan-tribulationists; and Calvinists and Arminians. Since our Baptist, Methodist, Lutheran, Catholic and Pentecostal brothers and sisters are going to worship with us in heaven if together we have believed in our hearts and confessed with our lips that God has raised Jesus from the dead, why should we not now begin to fellowship and worship together?

Our church seeks not to specialize in reaching any particular class of people. Among us should be the rich, the middle-class, and the poor; the student, the laborer, and the teacher; the secretary and the executive, the doctor and the nurse; the architect and the mason; the unemployed, the self-employed, and the employer.

Our church seeks no alignment with a political philosophy. We welcome the political conservative

and the political liberal. We welcome the Democrat, the Republican, and the Independent.

Our church seeks not to impose a uniformity of spiritual response upon its people. Worship quietly, worship audibly. Worship with traditional music of the past; worship with the music of the present. Worship God with hymns and worship God with choruses. Worship with Bach. Worship with Gaither. But whenever we worship and however we express our freedom in the Lord, we should seek to love Him with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength and love our neighbor as ourselves.

Our church seeks not to impose a unity of dress among its people. Within the bounds of Bible teaching on attractiveness and modesty, we can express our freedom to dress formally or casually.

The Church growth sociologists may continue to argue that only a socially and culturally homogeneous church can grow; however, this view omits something basic about the nature of Christ and His Church.

God has not called us to be like each other but to be like Jesus.

The more I become like Jesus, the more truly I am myself and the less I try to be like my brother or sister. The more I become like Jesus, the more I accept the uniqueness also of my brother and sister. In this way I find true unity in the Body, not the carbon copy imitation in a body which mistakes similarity for the true unity of the Spirit.

God has placed us as living stones in this body. We are not pre-fab, pre-formed construction material. We are quarried from the real stuff of life, fitted into one another to make the beautifully colored and variegated mosaic of God's church. One of the necessary functions of God's fitting us together is the chipping and sanding away of sharp edges. God is using the difference in my brother as a cutting instrument lopping off my impatience, judgmentalness, smugness, and spiritual ego.

God has not called His church to be a cookie cutter with all the cookies neatly rolling down the conveyor belt with a monotonous sameness. We must not seek the outward stamp of uniformity but the inward stamp of the Holy Spirit who bears witness that we are Children of God.

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