

## CHURCH PLANTING AND BUILDING IN EUROPE

### A Multicultural Approach: the importance of native languages

***Matthew 24:14*** *And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.*

Why was the Law of Moses not intended for one nation, Israel, alone? The reason is because the Law did not provide salvation, it was the shadow of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ through whom salvation was extended. “But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster” (Galatians 3:23-25). Once the Sun rises, the shadow recedes and disappears. Similarly, salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ is universal; it is for the entire world. It was for this reason that the Lord himself spoke first on the Day of Pentecost in all the languages of the world. This was a declaration of intent: the Lord Jesus preached salvation in the tongues of the world to enunciate a new era – one in which there are no shadows anymore, but authentic salvation for all of humanity. Jesus himself was the first to begin fulfilling his prophecy in Matthew 24:14.

***Act 2:7*** *And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilaeans?*

***Act 2:8*** *And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?*

***Act 2:9*** *Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judaea, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia,*

***Act 2:10*** *Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes,*

***Act 2:11*** *Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.*

***Act 2:12*** *And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this?*

Note that these people were Jews, and yet the Lord chose to speak to “every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born”. The Lord did not speak in Hebrew because they were Jews or were currently in Jerusalem where Hebrew was spoken, but in the language of the countries where they were born. This should have implications for us today. While the majority of us in the Apostolic Church of Europe Fellowship have roots in Africa, some have lived longer in European countries than African ones. In addition, we have children born in Europe and hence speaking European languages most proficiently. We must understand that language is power. God used his power to confuse languages at the Tower of Babel so the

world, which spoke one language at the time, would not be successful in their plan to rebel against God. A close reading of the Bible reveals that God did not actually create new and mutually incomprehensible languages but confused or mixed the one universal language. The Hebrew word for confound is *bālal* which means to mix. Put differently, we are all speaking a confused version of whatever the one original language Adam spoke in the beginning.

**Gen 11:1** *And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech.*

**Gen 11:6** *And the LORD said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.*

**Gen 11:7** *Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.*

What lessons should we draw from this in regard to church planting and building in a multicultural church such as ours? Clearly, God himself recognized and bestowed honor in the different languages which he created at the Tower of Babel. In the Upper Room, on the Day of Pentecost, God confirmed this multilingual reality when he addressed the pilgrim Jews in the languages, not of their Jewish ancestors, but the countries where they were born. In speaking in these languages the Lord Jesus made it clear that he was going back with them to win souls in their countries and establish churches in their mother or native tongues. A very important message must be spoken in the local language. Even the Devil knows this lesson well. He did not come to Jerusalem all the way from Assyria to speak in a foreign language, the language of the destroyer, and expect Hezekiah's men to faithfully translate his words.

**2Kings 18:26** *Then said Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, and Shebna, and Joah, unto Rabshakeh, Speak, I pray thee, to thy servants in the Syrian language; for we understand it: and talk not with us in the Jews' language in the ears of the people that are on the wall.*

**2Kings 18:27** *But Rabshakeh said unto them, Hath my master sent me to thy master, and to thee, to speak these words? hath he not sent me to the men which sit on the wall, that they may eat their own dung, and drink their own piss with you?*

**2Kings 18:28** *Then Rabshakeh stood and cried with a loud voice in the Jews' language, and spake, saying, Hear the word of the great king, the king of Assyria.*

To speak in the native tongue of the hearers is to speak to their hearts – to speak in a foreign tongue is to speak to their minds. The American poet, William Ross Wallace, wrote the poem, “The Hand That Rocks the Cradle Is the Hand That Rules the World” in 1865. He praised motherhood as a mission from God and a force for change in the world. A baby recognizes the mother's voice even before leaving the womb. Obviously, the language of the mother has power, which is why we call it mother tongue. I guess I am adopted, then, in the sense that another mother, English, took over the reigns of my life at the age of seven. This

may be true for some others here, but let us focus on the majority, not anomalies for the moment. The above goes to show the affective, emotional bonds that mother or native tongue possesses. The Kenyan writer, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, demonstrated quite powerfully the importance of mother tongue and how the British colonizers sought to destroy his identity and self-worth when they banned and punished those who spoke Gĩkũyũ, his mother tongue. They had to wear a sign with the words, "I am stupid" or "I am a donkey". In his classic book *Decolonising the Mind*, Ngũgĩ sees language, rather than history or culture, as the enabling condition of human consciousness: "The choice of language and the use of language is central to a people's definition of themselves in relation to the entire universe." Love thy neighbor as thyself means we have to respect their native languages. This is what the Jews failed to appreciate with the Samaritans.

***Luke 9:54*** And when his disciples James and John saw this, they said, Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven, and consume them, even as Elias did?

***Luke 10:33*** But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him,

***John 8:48*** Then answered the Jews, and said unto him, Say we not well that thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil?

Because the Samaritans were mixed in their ethnicity and language, they were hated by the Jews. This was through no fault of theirs but a consequence of the Babylonian exile. The Jews themselves forgot that their own language was a result of God confounding the one original language at the Tower of Babel. No one speaks the first, pristine language after the Tower of Babel. The good news is that God will give the world one pure language again "For then will I turn to the people a pure language, that they may all call upon the name of the LORD, to serve him with one consent" (Zephaniah 3:9).

We need to have a vision for languages in Europe. Our children speak the languages of the diverse countries of Europe. We need to use this competence to lay a good foundation for local churches. In Norway, we use our children to translate/interpret the messages – both in English and Norwegian and recently the responsibility for putting up the scriptures in Norwegian on the screen. This will give them bilingual competence in the word of God – the local language in addition to English, the global language. "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6).