

**ABSTRACT**  
**BILINGUAL PREACHING**  
**A PROPOSED METHODOLOGY FOR MULTICULTURAL CHURCHES**

by

Fikri Youssef

This dissertation examines the effectiveness level of bilingual preaching in communicating the message of the gospel to a multicultural church in North America. The study identifies best practices for bilingual preaching.

References to bilingualism can be found in the book of Acts at the very inception of the church as well as in different church documents at different points and places of the development of the church. In spite of bilingualism's long history in the church, a review of literature on bilingualism within the church reveals the varying formats and effectiveness of translated preaching is under researched. Therefore, a survey approach was adopted whereby research instruments (questionnaires and focus groups) were designed to be applied among leaders and congregants at La Casa Church targeting three distinct groups: people who speak English (they may also speak another language other than Spanish), people who speak only Spanish (and do not have proficient understanding of English), and people who are bilingual. Their answers were compared and contrasted with the opinions of external experts in the field of cross-cultural and interpreted preaching who were interviewed separately by the researcher. This triangulation helped to evaluate the effectiveness level of bilingual preaching among the different groups.

At the moment of the study, La Casa had an attendance of over 150 people from twenty-five different nations. The church is composed of Latino immigrants who speak

mainly Spanish (roughly two-fifths depending on the week), their fully bilingual children (approximately one-fifth), other immigrant nationalities who speak English aside from their native language (approximately one-fifth), and Anglo-Americans who speak mainly or only English (approximately one-fifth). The church is located in Nashville, Tennessee and its services are offered in Spanish/English. Throughout the year, the sermons are preached in English and Spanish in almost equal proportions alternating with translation to the other language.

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A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty of  
Asbury Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Ministry

by

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May 2023

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of this project and all the work it involved is a testament to the amazing grace and overwhelming love of God in my life. Since he called me from darkness to light and chose me to preach the gospel of Christ in different nations and languages, I knew he had hardwired me to stand in the gap to bridge different people groups together. At this moment of my journey, God leading me to work on a project in pursuit of cultural reconciliation and unity in the midst of diversity was only fitting. To my Lord and Savior, thank you for calling me out of Egypt, leading me to Bolivia to adopt and be adopted by a Bolivian family, and sending me as your missionary among Latinos and other minority groups in North America. I am honored to welcome them and their Anglo neighbors together to worship you, the only wise God. To you be the glory and honor forever and ever.

Secondly, I would like to honor the one human being without whom this project would never exist. To my co-preacher, co-researcher, and ministry life partner who has helped me more than anyone throughout my life, to my dear bride Margot, thank you! Thank you for believing in me and in the vision that God gave us when there was nothing else but vision. Thank you for being willing to move with me across the world to pursue together the mission of God even when you would have preferred to stay home with your family and friends. Thank you for sacrificing your time, your energy, and your own studies to plant churches with me and help me pursue this project till the end. I simply could not have done it without you. We are truly better together, and I am so blessed to stand by your side every time we get to preach together the eternal message of the gospel.

Although he is in eternity, I want to honor my father who even before knowing Christ encouraged me since an early age to learn as many languages as possible, a skill without which this project would have never crossed my mind. Thank you Dad for believing in me and pushing me to go further than I would have ever gone by myself. I am so thankful for being born to loving parents, who without having a missionary calling were led to move across the world and show me the beauty of God's diverse creation.

There are many people I am so thankful for and cannot possibly mention them all by name. A special thanks to Dr. Milton Lowe for inviting me to join the Doctor of Ministry program at Asbury Theological Seminary and to Dr. Ellen Marmon for encouraging me to keep persevering until I crossed the finish line. Both of you added wisdom and encouragement to my life that I am so grateful for. To my coach and friend Dr. David Ward, thank you for all your hard work to help me get on the right track and keep focused on the finish line. I would not be here without your invaluable help during this project. Similarly, to my friend and mentor Dr. Rice Brooks, thank you for pushing me to get better every day, for believing in me even through my darkest moments, and for inviting me to partner with you in preaching the gospel on campuses all over the world.

Finally, to my La Casa team, thank you so much for allowing me to be your pastor and for giving me the freedom and the constant encouragement to pursue this project till the end. Thank you to all who volunteered to participate in this study and shared your opinions boldly with me. You are the best team and the best church anyone could ask for. A special thanks to my only daughter, Amira. You are a great blessing and an inspiration to me. Thank you for always encouraging me and cheering me up all the time.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **NATURE OF THE PROJECT**

#### **Overview of the Chapter**

Chapter One provides the framework for this research that is intended to examine the effectiveness of bilingual preaching in communicating the message of the gospel to a multicultural church in Nashville, Tennessee. This Chapter includes the story behind the project and the statement of the problem that provoked this research. According to the 2020 census, over sixty-two million Latinos live in the United States, many of whom remain without being directly engaged with the Gospel. The greater Nashville area has a Latino population of almost a 150 thousand people. According to Pew Research, one-third of all Latinos living in the U.S. were born outside the country and speak only Spanish (*A Brief Statistical Report*). Others are second and third generation who speak English as well. In response to that reality, La Casa Church launched in 2019 with the vision of being a multicultural, multigenerational church that welcomes and integrates Spanish and English-speaking people into one unified congregation. To that end, a methodology of fully bilingual preaching was implemented since the beginning of the church. In this chapter, the purpose of this project as mentioned above will be briefly explained, introducing the three research questions that are intended to provide answers that would shed light on the purpose statement.

#### **Personal Introduction**

I was born and raised in Cairo, Egypt to a devout Coptic family. My faith journey began as a weekly church attendant who eventually became disillusioned with organized religion. At a young age I went on a three-year journey in search for truth. My journey

took me to skepticism and atheism. Yet, my mind continued to wonder, ‘if there is no God, what is a plausible origin of the vast universe we live in?’ Not satisfied with any answer from religious leaders or science and philosophy teachers, I decided to find out on my own if there is a God or not. I chose to apply an experimental method, where I simply challenged God if he existed to show himself to me within fifteen days, and if he did I would serve him for as long as I live. On April 3, 1989 God answered my prayer in a way I could not resist. So, I gladly surrendered my life to him.

My encounter with Christ changed my life in every way possible. Not only did my encounter change my faith and devotion, it changed my career and vocation. Up to this point, I was fluent in four languages and committed to a career in tourism. After I surrendered my life to Christ, I felt a strong calling to be a missionary to the nations. With much hesitation, I accepted the calling without knowing where would I go or what it meant to be a missionary. Two weeks later, my family decided to move to Bolivia and start a new life there. At the time, I did not know if this was a simple coincidence or if it was God’s way to move me to the nations he was calling me to. So, I did what I thought was best to do, I asked for a sign. I asked the Lord that if he was calling me to Bolivia to gift me the ability to speak Spanish fluently and without any foreign accent.

In June of 1989 my family moved to Bolivia, and by the grace of God I learned fluent Spanish in less than six weeks. That was all I needed to know that God has called me to that language and that culture for the rest of my life. I went to study theology at the Assemblies of God College in Bolivia where I met the young lady who became my wife after graduation. Since then, Margot and I have been serving together as pastors, church planters, and missionaries among Latinos. In early 2005 our only daughter, Amira, was

diagnosed with bilateral hip dislocation. Her diagnosis was frightening and her prognosis uncertain. We could not find any reliable medical treatment in Bolivia, so my wife and I took a six months sabbatical from the church we had planted and pastored, to come to the United States searching for the best medical treatment for our daughter. Even in the United States, the doctors said she would need several surgeries and there were no guaranties of the outcome, but the sooner we acted the better. Several significant events followed this challenging diagnosis. First, a hospital in Shreveport, Louisiana offered to take care of all Amira's medical needs for free. Second, she was miraculously healed from one side of her hips and did not need that surgery. Finally, after having the surgery on the other hip, we stayed in America for a few months for recovery and therapy. During that time, we saw the need and the challenges of the Latino population in the United States.

My wife and I went back to Bolivia. After much prayer, we decided to hand over our church to one of our leaders and become missionaries to the United States. We were particularly called to reach Latinos living in this nation. For the past fifteen years we have served among the Latino community in the United States in a variety of capacities, including pastoring, teaching, preaching, and church planting. We also remained well connected to local Anglo churches because of our proficiency in English and our network of relationships. For years I continued to encourage my friends who pastor Anglo churches to start Latino congregations or even Spanish services within their local churches. Although a few churches embraced the idea and started some efforts in Spanish, the grand majority were far from engaging the Latino community in their cities. Unfortunately, I observed that most Anglo churches which try to do some type of service

in Spanish do not give it the priority that it needs and deserves. Currently the United States is experiencing significant political polarization over the southern border and immigration. As a result, many Latinos already feel rejected and unwanted. When they decide to go to church and find out that the Spanish service is located at the least attractive part of the building or is scheduled at an inconvenient time, this simply perpetuates the feeling of segregation they already experience. As someone that has lived in both worlds, I know that American pastors would say they love Latinos, and these occurrences just come down to leadership, organization, budget, and space. However, I tend to believe they all come down to vision. If we have a vision to reach a certain people group, we will do everything we can and make every sacrifice possible to see that vision come through.

As time went by, my burden for the Latino community in Nashville increased and came to the point of no return. Something had to be done! After praying, observing, and connecting the dots, we decided to plant a multicultural church in Nashville that speaks both Spanish and English so it would welcome people that speak both languages alike. That is what kindled the fire behind this ministry transformation project. In fact, as I write this chapter, my wife and I are on our third year of pastoring La Casa Church in Nashville, TN. La Casa is a multicultural, multigenerational church that conducts its services in a fully bilingual manner that allows Spanish and English speakers to worship together while promoting unity and reconciliation between Latinos, North Americans, and other ethnicities.



### **Statement of the Problem**

The United States has a vast population of 62.1 million Latinos according to the 2020 census, both immigrants and native born. Many of them do not speak English yet and continue to hold on to their native language and culture. In addition, a continual influx of first-generation Latinos into North America exists. The same can be said about the greater Nashville area, that according to the latest census has a Latino population of around 15 percent of the city's population. The size of that particular people group, the difficulty of learning English, and other reasons that do not pertain to this research allows them to remain isolated in their own communities. Some of them are able to cross the linguistic barrier and join local English-speaking churches. Others simply prefer to find a Spanish speaking church to attend while a grand majority remains unreached by the gospel.

Another challenging factor is that the children of Latino immigrants usually learn English at school. Once they do, they prefer to communicate and even worship in English. This creates a dilemma for many Latino families. When they go to an English-speaking church, the children fit in while the parents are without understanding. Naturally, Spanish-only speaking churches emerged all over Nashville and The United States in general to reach out to the growing Latino population. These wonderful churches are a good fit for first generation Latinos, but their children struggle to fit in these homogenous Spanish-speaking communities.

With Jesus' great commission in mind "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations..." (English Standard Version, Matt. 28.19), the question presents itself: How can the church effectively reach and disciple Latinos living in North America, while giving

them an opportunity to join the majority of society that speaks mainly English? More importantly, the following questions arise: what can be done to overcome the generational and linguistic barrier between parents and children in these Latino families? Should it be expected that the parents learn English, and join English speaking churches? Should the local church start a Spanish service for the parents and hope that the children will join the English service? Should Latino pastors be equipped to plant Spanish-speaking only churches and let the second-generation issue solve itself? Or, are fully bilingual churches Spanish-English a valid option to include both generations and other cultures in one unified multicultural Church?

As an attempt to respond to this missional opportunity, La Casa Church launched in September 2019 as a fully bilingual church with side-by-side bilingual preaching as the main component of its weekend services. The leadership team at La Casa decided to implement bilingual preaching as a method to encourage Latino parents and children to worship together in the same church. Such service would also accommodate North Americans and other ethnic groups that speak English in the same congregation. Spanish-English bilingual preaching is scarce in North America, and in the Nashville area only one church exists that offered it at the time of this research. That is why, after three years of weekly bilingual services, examining the effectiveness level of bilingual preaching in communicating the message of the gospel to a multicultural church seemed important. Should this research find bilingual preaching to be an effective tool in communicating the message, then bilingual preaching would offer a viable solution to the stated problem.

### **Purpose of the Project**

The purpose of this project was to examine the effectiveness level of bilingual preaching in communicating the message of the gospel to a multicultural church in a North American context.

### **Research Questions**

In order to accomplish the project's purpose, three important research questions need to be answered.

#### **Research Question #1**

In the opinion of pastors and leaders at La Casa Church, what are the characteristic components of the bilingual preaching practiced at its worship services?

#### **Research Question #2**

In the opinion of key leaders and congregants at La Casa Church, what are the main benefits and challenges of bilingual preaching?

#### **Research Question #3**

What methods, practices, or ways of being would increase the effectiveness level of bilingual preaching at a multicultural church in North America?

### **Rationale for the Project**

This project is founded on Jesus' Great Commission "Go and make disciples of all nations..." (Matt. 28.19). The Lord commissioned his disciples to go and make disciples of all nations. The word nations in that context is best translated as cultures or ethnic groups as it comes from the Greek word "*ethnos*." To be clear, Jesus was not speaking about nations as people groups with borders found on a political map. Instead, he was sending the disciples to make disciples of all ethnic groups in the world. Most

missiologists agree that an ethnic group is a group of people that holds a common set of behaviors and a common language. For centuries, ethnic groups stayed together at one geographic location no matter how vast that location was. Therefore, the work of a missionary aiming to reach a particular ethnic group was to learn their language and basic culture so he/she can communicate the gospel with them effectively. At the tail end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century, the ethnic lines changed dramatically in our world. People movement in search of a better life, forced migration, and the constant shift from rural to urban living has resulted in a continual influx of diverse ethnic groups into the cosmopolitan urban centers of the world. Such concentration of people from different cultures does not necessarily translate into merging of cultures like the utopia of the old American dream of one big melting pot.

A clear example of that is the city of Nashville that used to be a typical southern city with a predominantly white population, intermixed with a significant black minority. However, in the last few years, Nashville has experienced an unprecedented influx of several ethnic groups that completely changed the landscape of the city. Kurds, Egyptians, Afghans, Brazilians, and a myriad of Latinos from North, Central, and South America. As important and valuable as every ethnic group is this research is focused on Latinos as a large people group living in The United States in general (sixty-two million) and in Nashville in particular (one hundred and fifty thousand approximately). These numbers reflected in the 2020 census reveal that Latinos are the largest ethnic group in the United States that share a common language (Spanish) and a core of cultural similarities. With that in mind, exploring the best practices to reach that particular people group with the transforming message of the gospel seems of great importance.

The growing size of this people group, their entrenched cultural identity around Spanish, their challenges to learn English while working hard to make a living, and, in some cases, their undocumented migratory status have forced them to be more isolated from the rest of the population. As a response to that reality, many businesses and organizations that only speak Spanish started engaging the Latino community. Finding Spanish speaking bakeries, restaurants, realtors, lenders, and even churches all over has become normal. That in itself took away the urgency of learning English to live and function in America. As a result, Latinos became more isolated from the general population. Another observable phenomenon among Latinos is that the children either born in America or who arrived at a very young age identify more as ‘Americans’ and prefer to speak English even when they can understand Spanish perfectly. The linguistic diversity within the nuclear family adds stress on the relationship between parents and children and brings to the forefront the following question: In what language would these families choose to worship? The parents usually prefer to worship in Spanish while the children gravitate toward worshiping in English.

In consideration of all these factors and with a sense of mission to reach Latinos from different walks of life in Nashville, La Casa Church launched in September of 2019 adopting a bilingual preaching methodology. Bilingual preaching at La Casa Church aimed to enable Latino parents and children to listen together to the same sermon in their language of preference. At the same time, bilingual services aimed to offer an opportunity to North Americans and other ethnic groups who speak only English to partake of the same worship service with their Latino brothers and sisters. As researcher Teresa Parish mentions “At the heart of translation, including interpreted preaching, is

that all cultures, with their languages, histories and beliefs, are worthy of God's attention, and of hearing the gospel in their heart language" (Parish 5).

La Casa is the first church in Nashville to offer fully bilingual preaching (Spanish–English) in a side-by-side alternating manner. At La Casa, two people are always on stage, one speaking Spanish and the other speaking English. At the time of writing this research, La Casa remained the only known church in Nashville offering side-by-side bilingual preaching in all its weekend services. After three years of this missional venture, examining the effectiveness level of bilingual preaching in communicating the message of the gospel to this multicultural church, aiming to bring together generations of Latinos in a welcoming environment for North Americans and other ethnicities to worship together, seemed important.

Today, La Casa Church has grown into a community of over one hundred and fifty people from twenty-five nations, speaking eight different languages. The pastoral team affirmed that the congregation has attracted families where both spouses are from different languages, families with first and second generations immigrants, monolingual Latinos searching for a diverse community, and North Americans desiring to interact with other cultures. Surprisingly, La Casa is also attracting a fair share of people who do not speak Spanish or English as a primary language, yet they find themselves represented at this multicultural community of disciples. The purpose of this research was to examine the effectiveness level of bilingual preaching in communicating the message of the gospel to a multicultural church. This research seeks to examine if bilingual preaching is an effective tool to communicate the gospel and help build a multicultural church in Nashville, and if so could it be a recommended preaching method to reach the growing

Latino population in the United States, which would be of considerable missiological implications for the efforts of church planting in North America.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

**Latinos:** Confusion exists on what to call people from Spanish speaking nations living in North America. Some call them Hispanics. Some call them Latinos. Some simply mistakenly call them Mexicans or even Spanish. For the purpose of this research the term Latinos refers to people from all nineteen Latin American nations in the western hemisphere. That includes first generation immigrants or otherwise as long as they maintain fluency in Spanish as part of their cultural heritage. By definition, that would exclude Spaniards who, although they speak Spanish, are not Latin American by culture.

**North America:** Geographically, North America includes Canada, Mexico, and the United States. For the purpose of this research, North America refers only to the predominantly English-speaking nations of Canada and the United States. These are the countries where Latinos, although a sizeable group, are considered a minority. Among Latinos, Mexico is recognized as part of Latin America which is not a geographical denomination as much as a cultural one.

**Bilingual preaching:** For the purpose of this research, bilingual preaching refers to side-by-side preaching where both preachers, or preacher and interpreter, alternate to speak the same message in their language of fluency.

**Established church:** Many ways exist to decide if a church is established or still a church plant. For the purpose of this research, an established church is one that maintains an average of over one hundred people in regular weekend service attendance, has a fully developed leadership team, and is fully self-sustaining.

**Multicultural Church:** For the purposes of this study, a multicultural church is defined as one that includes people from different nationalities, different ethnic groups who speak different languages, and where no particular group exceeds 70 percent of the church population. For example, Egyptians who speak Arabic, Mexicans who speak Spanish, Filipinos who speak Tagalog, North Americans who speak English, and so on.

**Effectiveness level:** For the purpose of this project, the effectiveness level of bilingual preaching (Spanish/English) was measured on a scale of 1 to 5. 1 being the lowest level and 5 the highest level of effectiveness. 1 = Viability for the case study. 2 = Suitability for a specific context. 3 = Capability to accomplish the church vision. 4 = Desirability by the majority of congregants. 5 = Reproducibility in other contexts.

**Diversity:** For the purposes of this research, the term diversity, when used in reference to humans, only refers to people from different colors, ethnic groups, cultures, and languages which stands firmly by the biblical narrative of God creating the first human couple in his own image, and from the original couple, all humankind descends without any reference to gender diversity or any other kind of diversity.

### **Delimitations**

The purpose of this project was to examine the effectiveness level of bilingual preaching in communicating the message of the gospel to a multicultural church in a North American context. The project focused on a case study of La Casa Church in Nashville, TN. La Casa is the first known church in the city offering side-by-side bilingual preaching in every weekend service. Most of the individuals who participated in this study were congregants and leaders at La Casa Church who can bring a unique perspective on bilingual preaching. The research included bilingual preachers and



interpreters at La Casa, Spanish speaking leaders who have been involved in church for more than one-year, English speaking leaders who have been involved in church for more than one year, and bilingual leaders who are fluent in both Spanish and English alike. Obtaining data from both male and female leaders was very important. The age group selected for this study was between eighteen and fifty-five years old. This represents the majority of the church congregants. Congregants and leaders that do not speak neither Spanish nor English were excluded from this study for obvious reasons. In addition, the research consulted other speakers that practice bilingual preaching Spanish-English in their weekend services in other cities of North America, and other scholars in the area of interpreted preaching.

### **Review of Relevant Literature**

The literature review for this research began with biblical foundations of preaching in general, preaching to a multicultural audience in particular, and the presence of bilingualism in the beginnings of the church. Special attention is given to the origin of languages in the biblical narrative. Followed by a review of the theological foundations for diversity and multicultural churches from the perspective of God, his mission, and his people. A third category of reviewed literature was on the message of the gospel for a multicultural church. The fourth category was on the homiletical framework with a brief analysis of the practice of preaching in general, multicultural preaching in particular, and ending with the specific analysis of bilingual preaching. Finally, the literature review ends with a brief overview of bilingual preaching in church history and missions in order to discern if a correlation exists between bilingual preaching and the fulfillment of the great commission as expressed in Matthew 28.19.

## **Research Methodology**

### **Type of Research**

This research was designed to be a pre-intervention. After three years of preaching bilingual sermons every week at La Casa Church, the researcher set out to examine the effectiveness level of bilingual preaching in communicating the message of the gospel to a multicultural church. Two important goals of this project were to determine if bilingual preaching is: (1) central to pursuing the vision of La Casa Church long term; and (2) a potentially reproducible model recommended for multicultural church planting in North America. The research involved a select group of leaders and congregants that has been faithfully involved at La Casa Church between 2020 and 2022. As the Senior Pastor and co-founder of the church, this researcher was a fully engaged participant-observer in this study.

### **Participants**

To examine the effectiveness level of bilingual preaching in communicating the message of the gospel to a multicultural church, the participants chosen for this study were grouped into three categories: (1) The first category of participants are the members of the church's ministry team, including pastors, preachers, interpreters, and ministry team leaders. These participants have been part of the core team of La Casa for at least two years and are committed to the vision and values of the church. (2) The second category of participants are key leaders and congregants who speak either English, Spanish, or both languages and that have been faithfully involved in church for more than one year. The faithful involvement aspect was determined by the following criteria:

1. Attendance to the weekend services of at least twice a month.

2. Participation in the four stages of the church's discipleship process.
3. Service in at least one area of church ministry.
4. Faithful giving to support the church vision.

The participants in these two categories were both males and females with ages between eighteen and sixty years old. The participants were selected by the researcher based on the recommendation of the church's pastoral team and the pastors' knowledge of where each participant stood on the selection criteria detailed above. (3) The third category of participants interviewed were external experts in the field of cross-cultural preaching and interpreted preaching. They are also preachers who practice side-by-side bilingual preaching in other North American or global contexts.

### **Instrumentation**

Three researcher designed tools were used for this study: (1) Bilingual preaching components questionnaire. The questionnaire was given to each participant from the church's ministry team. The questionnaire was presented in English, yet, participants were given the opportunity to respond in their preferred language, either English or Spanish. (2) Bilingual preaching benefits/challenges focus groups. The same discussion questions were directed to three focus groups: Group A was composed of Spanish speakers only. Group B were English speakers only. Group C was made of bilingual participants. The purpose of the focus groups was to discern the level of understanding of the bilingual sermon by the monolingual participants in relationship to the bilingual participants. (3) Semi-structured interviews with external experts in the field of cross-cultural and interpreted preaching as well as preachers and interpreters who practice bilingual preaching in other contexts of North America. These experts were selected

based on their scholarly work in cross-cultural preaching or, in the case of preachers and interpreters, their practice of bilingual preaching for at least five years and their adherence to biblical orthodoxy.

### **Data Collection**

Open-ended written questionnaires were administered online, and the data was collected via the online tool without the personal information of any of the participants. The three focus groups met one time to discuss the benefits and challenges of bilingual preaching at La Casa Church as well as to explain how bilingual preaching impacts their understanding of the sermon. Three focus groups met separately and discussed the same questions. The key variable for each group was their language preference, whether Spanish, English, or bilingual. The researcher collected the data via video recording that was previously announced to the group and a consent form was signed by each one of them agreeing to participate in the research and to be recorded for this purpose. The data was then transcribed from the recording to the researcher's password protected computer. The experts' interviews were conducted online via Zoom, and each interview was recorded to allow for the researcher to collect the data from the recording and type it into the password protected computer.

### **Data Analysis**

To properly examine the effectiveness of bilingual preaching in communicating the message of the gospel to a multicultural church, the study includes a thorough analysis of the open-ended questionnaire answered by the participants, the responses of the three focus groups, and the summary of the interviews to the experts and preachers from other ministries. The investigation involved identifying strengths and weaknesses of

bilingual preaching (Spanish-English), as well as how it impacted the monolingual participants of both languages in comparison to the bilingual participants in the research. The data collected from the experts' interviews was analyzed to discern best practices to increase the effectiveness level of bilingual preaching in North America.

### **Generalizability**

This project focused on examining the effectiveness level of bilingual preaching in the context of Spanish and English within a multicultural church in the United States. In the practice studied, the preacher and interpreter are both part of the preaching team, are fluent in both languages studied, and have similar theological and homiletical formation. Although in the case studied the preacher and the interpreter are both trained preachers, the results will hopefully benefit other ministries where the interpreter is not necessarily a preacher, when the preacher is monolingual, and/or only the interpreter is bilingual. More importantly, the project hopes to shed light on the effectiveness of bilingual preaching to help establish a growing multicultural church in North America regardless of the two languages spoken in that particular congregation.

### **Project Overview**

Chapter Two reviews the relevant literature through biblical, theological, practical, and historical lenses to examine the effectiveness of bilingual preaching, or preaching with an interpreter in church history, world missions and church expansion. The chapter will review literature from a variety of disciplines, including but not limited to theology, communication, homiletics, and church history. Chapter Three presents the research methodology as it relates to answering the three research questions, the number and type of participants as well as the kinds of instruments used for data collection and

analysis. Chapter Four reports the project's findings based on answers given by participants in open-ended questionnaires, focus groups, and personal interviews. Chapter Five presents the summary of the analysis and conclusions derived from the interpretation of the data, suggestions for further research, and potential applications in different contexts.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW FOR THE PROJECT

#### Overview of the Chapter

Bilingual preaching, or preaching with interpretation, has been a common practice in the church since its beginning in the book of Acts. For centuries, missionaries had to either learn the language of their target audience or use an interpreter to communicate their message. Today, bilingual preaching or preaching with interpretation is a common practice in many parts of the world either because the preacher does not speak the language of the congregation or because more than one predominant language is present. In the case of North America, preaching has been predominantly monolingual, mainly in English for the dominant majority or in another specific language for a particular ethnic congregation. According to the 2020 census, the Latino population in the United States had topped 62 million people. Pew Research Center estimates about a third of that number (20 million) were born outside of the United States while the remainder of those who identify themselves as Latinos were home born (*A Brief Statistical Report*). This diverse group of Latinos makes bilingualism in North America a reality the church cannot ignore. Different divisions exist of this large group, dividing it into smaller subgroups. For the purpose of this discussion, at least three groups emerge: (1) Latinos who are fluent in Spanish and English; (2) Latinos who speak only Spanish with very limited or no understanding of English; and (3) Those who speak only English with limited or no understanding of Spanish.

This reality highlights the need to examine bilingual preaching Spanish/English as a preaching methodology to communicate the message of the gospel to the multicultural

communities forming in the North American landscape. Considering the multicultural aspect of these communities would also be of great interest. The term Latino or even Hispanic is a unifying name for those who speak Spanish and come from Latin American roots. Nevertheless, a multiplicity of cultures is represented within the vast territory extending from Argentina and Chile in the south to Mexico in the north. In addition, when these cultures move to the United States, they mix among each other and mingle among the predominant Anglo population and the other ethnic groups living in the same geographical location. Like Justo Gonzales says, this mixing and mingling results in the formation of new subcultures adding complexity to the multicultural fabric of the North American society, hence the need to examine the effectiveness of the way the message of the gospel is being communicated to them (Gonzales and Jimenez 28-29).

Even with the vast use of the practice globally, the field of bilingual preaching is still under-researched. The resources related to bilingual preaching in North America are limited making this research even more relevant from a missiological perspective. This literature review examines the biblical foundations of the purpose statement from preaching in general to preaching to a multicultural audience in particular. The biblical origin of languages is reviewed as well as the history of bilingualism in the beginning of the church. The theological foundations section reviews the literature on diversity and multicultural churches from the perspective of God, his mission, and his people. The third section reviews the literature pertinent to the message of the gospel for multicultural churches. The fourth section reviews the literature regarding preaching in multicultural and bilingual churches. The final section traces bilingual preaching throughout church history. Special attention is given to literature examining the influence of



multiculturalism in North America on the preaching event whether it be monolingual or bilingual. Finally, this chapter examines the relevant literature which guided the research methodology for this project.

### **Biblical Foundations**

This section briefly reviews what the New Testament says about both the general task of preaching and the specific task of preaching to a multicultural audience. Special attention is given to the origin of languages in the biblical story and its relationship with the meta-narrative of Scriptures. The origin of bilingualism in the beginning of the church is traced to examine if it had a role to play in the rapid advancement of the gospel in the book of Acts from the relatively small city of Jerusalem to Rome, the capital of the first century world.

A simple overview of history of the time reveals multilingualism was a nearly ever-present reality in the territory covered by the book of Acts. This raises a crucial question: How could the gospel spread so fast between people who do not speak the same language? More importantly, what role does language play in the process of preaching the gospel to new territories and cultures? Was what happened in Pentecost God's attempt to remedy his previous decision of language diversification? Or, by enabling a small group of Jewish people to communicate the gospel to a multicultural, multilingual crowd of at least eighteen different nations was God revealing his purpose and plan for multilingual communication? I examine each one of these questions in the following sections.

## **The Task of Preaching**

The proclamation of the good news is at the core of the New Testament Scriptures from the four gospels to the book of Acts through all the epistles including Revelation. Jesus started his ministry by defining himself as a preacher of the Gospel. In Luke 4.16-20, he stood up in front of the synagogue of his home town Nazareth and read the text of Isaiah 61.1-2. Then, he rolled up the scroll and boldly told his audience this Scripture was fulfilled in their hearing. He was the preacher of the good news to the poor. He was sent to proclaim liberty to the captives and to announce the favor of the Lord. An important element of this text is it declares Jesus was sent to preach. Although this text does not mention the Father by name, it clearly states he has anointed Jesus with the Spirit of the Lord. This presents a beautiful image of the Trinitarian God working together to send, anoint, and fulfill the ministry of preaching the good news. Emmanuel Carlos talks about the importance of examining the elements of preaching shown in the Scriptures to draw some principles to better equip today's preachers. One of the five elements Carlos highlights as central is the sending or commissioning of the preacher by God himself (Carlos 22).

Jesus was sent by the Father to preach the good news as is evidenced in multiple locations in the Gospels (e.g. Matt. 4.17; Mark 1.11-15; Luke 4.18; John 1.14-17). Yet, the pattern of sending did not end with the earthly ministry of Jesus. At the end of his earthly ministry and before his ascension to heaven, Jesus commissions his disciples to go and preach the gospel to all creation (Mark 16.15). Some scholars are apprehensive about this verse as Mark 16.9-20 is not present in some of the oldest manuscripts. Elijah Hixson argues these contested verses are present in many old manuscripts and has been

quoted as Scriptures by preachers from the first and second century like Irenaeus, Justin Martin, and Tatian (2). Though no conclusive evidence exists to prove if these verses were or were not written by the original author of the Gospel, a canonical approach received these texts as both inspired and authorized by the church. Regardless, the resemblance of Mark 16.15 with Matthew 28.19 where Jesus commissions his Apostles to go and make disciples of all nations clarifies the issue of sending and endows the ministry of preaching with divine authority. In fact, Mark makes this clear in the beginning of his Gospel. Jesus appointed a few disciples “that they might be with him, and that he might send them out to preach” (Mark 3.14). At this early stage of the Gospel, the evangelist was affirming the second main reason the disciples were chosen was to become preachers of the good news. The main reason was to walk with Jesus which would become the source of their authority and preaching ministry.

Matthew is the evangelist who registers the first sending of the twelve to preach. Throughout chapter 10, he explains how Jesus gave them clear instructions of where to go and what to do. For the moment, they were to preach only to the lost sheep of Israel (10.5-6). Second, they were to proclaim that the kingdom of God is near (10.7). Third, they were to perform miracles as needed (10.8-9). Then, he gives them several specific instructions about how to proceed on their preaching journey (10.10-31). Jesus sent his disciples first to preach only to the nation of Israel which could seem contradictory to his great commission at the end of the Gospel when he sends them to “go and make disciples of all nations...” (Matt. 28.19). Nevertheless, from a preaching perspective, this practice could be seen as a legitimate equipping exercise.

During his time on earth, Jesus equips and sends his disciples to preach the gospel to the people of Israel first, then to Samaria. At the end of his ministry time on earth, and just before he ascends to heaven, he sends them to preach the good news to all nations (from the word *ethnē*, Matt. 28.19). From the book of Acts to early church history, examples abound of older preachers commissioning their younger disciples to continue the good work of preaching the gospel.

A quick scan of the book of Acts and the New Testament would render many clear examples. The eleven chose Mathias to join them in witnessing of the resurrection of Christ (Acts 1.21-26). The commissioning of Stephen as a deacon eventually leads to him becoming a preacher of the gospel and the first martyr for Christ (Acts 6.5, 8; 7.1-60). Phillip, began as a deacon then became a preacher in Samaria and later on a recognized evangelist (Acts 6.5; 8.5). Peter was sent by the Holy Spirit to preach to the gentile Cornelius and his household (Acts 10.20). Barnabas was sent to Antioch by the Jerusalem church to preach to the new converts and make sure they received the true gospel (Acts 11.22-24). Barnabas then brings Paul with him to Antioch to preach at the church for a whole year (Acts 11.25-26). The church at Antioch, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, sent Barnabas and Paul on their first missionary journey to preach the Gospel to Jews and Gentiles (Acts 13.2). Later on, the duo separates over the worthiness of Mark as a preacher. Paul brings on Silas, and they are sent by the brothers to revisit and strengthen the previously established churches (Acts 15.40-41). Meanwhile, Barnabas takes Mark to Cyprus and keeps training him for ministry (Acts 15.39). Later on, Mark writes his gospel becoming one of the four evangelists to narrate the story of Jesus. Paul calls him very useful to him for ministry (2 Tim. 4.11), and some historical

data as early as the second century mentions that the church of Alexandria in Egypt claims to be founded by the apostle Mark (Gonzales, *Story of Christianity* 37).

Perhaps the clearest example of an older preacher who trains and sends a younger preacher is Paul and Timothy. Paul first brings Timothy on the team as a young disciple (Acts 16.1-3). After equipping him, he sends him to multiple missions to preach in the churches the Apostle had started earlier in life. Finally, at the end of his career, Paul charges Timothy to preach the good news and reminds him that he laid hands on him and sent him to go preach the gospel (2 Tim. 1.6-8).

All of these examples highlight a particular case where a person or a group is specifically called and sent to preach. However, the apostle Peter seems to advocate for a more generalized calling to preach for all believers. When the author says, “but you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness to his marvelous light.” (1 Peter 2.9), he is clearly speaking to the whole church and charging them to proclaim the good news (*exangellō*). This could be interpreted as a calling for the whole body of Christ to ‘preach’ in one way or another. Though this is likely true in the broadest sense of the concept of preaching, the biblical evidences presented above show a specific commissioning and sending exists of certain individuals whom God calls and sets apart for the particular ministry of preaching (*kērussō*) in a more consuming way to the point they may be called a preacher (*kērux*). Within the larger set of preachers in the New Testament period, two divisions exist. First, some remained mainly monocultural like James who stayed in Jerusalem. Second, others ventured to share the good news

cross-culturally. The majority of attention in the book of Acts is given not to the first group, but to the second group: those who preach cross-culturally.

### **Preaching to a Multicultural Audience**

The progression of Jesus' sending his disciples to preach is evidenced by sending them first to the lost sheep of Israel, then taking them to Samaria to experience their first multicultural ministry assignment (John 4.27-38). Jesus stresses the fact that the Father sent him to preach to a diverse audience (4.34-36). This must have been a revolutionary thought for these Jewish men who were under the impression salvation was Israel centered. Jesus commands them to look at the Samaritans and open their eyes for the fields are ripe for harvest. He needed to walk his disciples from their close-minded monocultural understanding of national salvation to a broader picture of God's master plan to provide salvation for all cultures and languages in Christ. Their comprehension and acceptance could not shift overnight from salvation centered in Israel to salvation for all cultures of the world. Keener suggests Jesus' need to pass through Samaria (John 4.4) might have been more spiritual than geographical since he uses a less traveled route for Jewish travelers (*Bible Background Commentary* 258). By staying in Samaria for a while, Jesus demonstrated he was fulfilling part of his ministry and not simply in a rush to get to Galilee. Preaching to the Samaritans, who were ethnically and religiously a syncretistic blending of Jews and Gentiles, was the necessary bridge to open the disciples' minds for their ultimate great commission to all nations in Matthew 28.19.

Whether mental, emotional, or spiritual, the disciples projected a certain blindness towards the Samaritans' personhood so much so that when the people of a certain Samaritan village refused to receive Jesus, James and John wanted to ask for fire to come

down from heaven and consume them (Luke 9.52-54). This kind of blindness is symptomatic of cultural prejudice. Noticeably, the disciples did not have the same reaction towards the Jewish religious leaders who rejected Jesus in an even more hateful way, calling him someone who has a demon (John 7.20). Cultural and ethnic prejudice would certainly be a big hindrance to the great commission if not dealt with. This prejudice is probably one of the reasons why Jesus brings his disciples to Samaria in John 4 to witness a great harvest among them, and by doing so deal with their cultural biases. Even so, a strong persecution and other influencing factors was necessary for the disciples to finally leave Jerusalem and go to other nations.

Nevertheless, being forced to go to other nations did not mean the first disciples would preach to other ethnic groups like Jesus commanded them in Matthew 28.19. The book of Acts registers the progression of how the gospel went from Jerusalem to all nations. First, the gospel was taken to Samaria with Philip where the church sent Peter and John to make sure that the Samaritans have truly received the pure gospel. Then, the story of the Ethiopian eunuch marks the first preaching to someone from a completely different culture. Yet, he still was a Jewish proselyte. Finally, in Acts 10.9-16, God confronts Peter with a vision three times to exhort him to preach the gospel to all nations. Noticeably, Peter kept saying he has never eaten anything impure or unclean, and God kept replying “do not call anything impure that God has made clean” (Acts 10.15). Even so, Peter’s first message to a multicultural group at the house of Cornelius began with these words “You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or visit anyone of another nation” (Acts 10.28). At the end of the sermon, the Holy Spirit filled the gentile new believers and they started to speak in tongues to the amazement and

disbelief of the Jewish believers present (Acts 10.45-46). At that point, for the first time in church history, a true gentile was baptized in water and added to the church. When Peter relayed these things to the church in Jerusalem, they were extremely surprised that God would grant salvation to the gentiles. In fact, they said “then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life” (Acts 11.18).

In reality, a true multicultural audience began to form in the church in Antioch. The author of Acts mentions how when the men of Cyprus and Cyrene preached the Lord Jesus to the Greeks, the hand of the Lord was with them and a great number believed (Acts 11.20-21). Once again, the Jerusalem church was skeptical of the gentiles’ conversion. So, they sent Barnabas to investigate and report back to them. Barnabas, filled with the Holy Spirit, saw the grace of God and brought Saul with him to teach and disciple the first fully multicultural congregation in church history. Curiously, the author of Acts chooses to end this particular story with this affirmation “and in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians” (Acts 11.28). Luke was plausibly trying to highlight that Christianity began to be recognized as its own religion when the disciples obeyed their Lord’s commission and began to reach out to include gentiles in the church. However, for the interest of this research, noting that the church in Antioch was the first church to fully include believers from non-Jewish background in its community is important. Harvey C. Kwiyani agrees with this argument as he affirms:

The Spirit of Jesus unites us together in diversity. The very name, Christian, should always remind us of the first multicultural community that worshipped together in Antioch in the 40s CE, standing out against other worshipping communities, and warranting the coining of a new word – *christianoï*. (132).



Even then, and after the first missionary journey out of the church of Antioch, the Jerusalem church was still skeptical about Gentile conversions. The first great council of the church was called to examine Paul and Barnabas' testimony and to determine whether the gentiles would be granted full membership in the church. At the end, Peter's testimony and James' intervention made way for the approval of people from other nations to belong to the church as long as they abstain from idolatry, sexual immorality, what has been strangled, and blood. (Acts 15.1-22).

From there on, all throughout the book of Acts, church history, and all the way to recent missionary journeys, the preacher of the gospel was faced with the reality of preaching to multicultural audiences. In the times of the New Testament, the *Pax Romana* came with the movement of people from one region to another. The Romans established colonies and encouraged people from all over the empire to move into them. This resulted in a tapestry of many cultures gathering and mingling in the ancient world's communities. Whether Ephesus, Philippi, Athens, or Rome, multiple cultures were everywhere. Rome by itself is said to have been one the most multicultural cities in the world (Lampe 20). These multicultural communities, even when they could speak a common language like Greek or Latin, were not speaking in their heart language. As a result, room for miscommunication and misunderstanding was ample.

Such was the case of Paul and Silas preaching in Philippi where their first convert was Lydia, a visiting merchant or perhaps immigrant from Thyatira (Act 16.14). Thyatira is a city in Asia Minor, a region in modern day Western Turkey. Later on, the jailer and his family, most likely Europeans native to Philippi, receive the good news and joined the church. In addition, many Jewish believers accept Paul's message and join the same

church. Keener argues “the fact that Luke mentions that Philippi was a colony (16:12) seems significant for his understanding of the city’s identity” (Acts Commentary 2382). He then theorizes how Luke possibly highlights Philippi more than other Roman colonies like Pisidian Antioch because he stayed and led the church in Philippi for a few years (Acts Commentary 2383). That would have given Luke the understanding and the experience of preaching and ministering to a multicultural church. Philippi was established as a colony by Mark Anthony in 42 BC. Then Octavian sent in more Roman settlers in 31 BC so that it acquired a certain Roman status. Nevertheless, the city had a lot of Greek influence, Greek residents, and other residents from several parts of the empire including Lydia from Asia Minor. This amalgam of people is the definition of a multicultural society which was reflected in the church established by Paul and pastored by Luke. Following threads like these all over the New Testament renders a reality of how multicultural and multilingual the audiences of the first apostolic teams’ preaching were. When considering the complexities of preaching to a multilingual audience like the apostles were frequently exposed to, questions about the origin and role of languages in the communication process come to the forefront of the discussion.

### **The Origin of Languages**

The origin of languages is clearly established in Scriptures at the story of the tower of Babel in Genesis 11.1-9. This text indicates how humans at the time spoke only one language and were as one people. An earlier text explains God’s mandate given to humanity when he blessed Noah and his family and commanded them in Genesis 9.1-2 to fill the whole earth and take dominion of it. The story of Babel highlights how humanity disregarded God’s mandate given to Noah. They decided to “build a city with a tower

that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth” (Gen. 11.4). At this point, God intervenes and confuses their language so they could not understand each other. The question is: Did God confuse their language as a punishment for their disobedience, or as a blessing to redirect them toward his original mandate to fill the earth and take dominion of it? The context of the story, and the fact it ends with God dispersing them over the face of all the earth, communicates his divine intention to redirect them toward his original intent in creation. This being the case, the diversity of languages functions as a blessing and not a curse.

Daniel Everett categorizes this biblical story as a myth (2). He alludes to the Hebrew God as afraid of humanity’s ability to communicate with each other in one language. This is why he creates many languages to discourage them from working together. Everett misinterprets the term babel as gate (*bab*) of god (*el*) when the more accurate translation of the term is confusion as it comes from the root Hebrew word (*balbal*) meaning to confuse. He bases his theory about God’s fear of the strength of men, who if united would soon reach his gates to dethrone him. This interpretation is based on his mistaken linguistic translation of the term. Everett then accuses the Hebrew god of lacking in sociological understanding as if he does not understand the diversity of languages and cultures as a strength for humankind.

Even though Everett does not believe in the authenticity of the biblical story, he does highlight the diversity of languages’ ability to enrich humanity and not to diminish it (2-3). To bring this thought into a biblical worldview, God knowing the power of languages chose to bless humanity with a diversity of them at the tower of Babel. He

does this so they would go all over the earth and fill it with life and culture, fulfilling his original creation mandate given to Adam and Eve: “God blessed them. And God said to them, be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” (Genesis 1.28).

Andrew Owen refutes the idea of the story of Babel as a myth and language as just the result of evolution like Everett affirms.

Language is too complex and systematic, and our capacity to acquire it is too facile, to be adequately explained by cultural use and general learning alone. But the process of evolution is too convoluted and adventitious to have produced this complex phenomenon by lucky mutation or the genetic internalization of language behavior. (17-18)

The core of Owen’s argument is humans could not have developed such a rich diversification of languages and dialects by themselves. Believing the Almighty Creator of the vast universe is also the originator of the diversity of languages present in the world is more plausible. Not that God himself created each one of the other seven thousand languages and dialects spoken today. Instead, at Babel he most likely created the original families of languages, and, through time and use these original languages, subdivided into more languages and dialects based on use, culture, and geography. This process would be in tune with the biblical story of God creating human beings in his image, giving them the ability to procreate and so on to participate in his act of creation (Gen. 1.26-28).

Therefore, if the origin of languages in Genesis 11 is a positive act of God to redirect mankind toward his original intent in creation, then assuming he has a purpose for the diversity of languages in his redemptive plan would be fair. God’s purpose could

find its significance in the story of Pentecost in Acts 2 when he uses a group of frightened Jewish believers to speak to a multilingual crowd of over three thousand people from eighteen different nations.

Irina Premota argues God is the originator of the diversity of languages at the tower of Babel based on Genesis 11.7. This would also make him the creator of the need for interpretation. She mentions several important cases of interpretation in the biblical text including the Egyptian interpreters in the story of Joseph (Gen. 42.23), the captives converted into interpreters by king Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 1.3-4), Ezra's efforts in interpreting the Torah into Aramaic (Neh. 8.8), and the fact Jesus himself explained the Hebrew Old Testament Scriptures to his disciples in their native Aramaic. She then proposes that God himself is the first one to provide interpretation for the communication of the message of the Gospel at the day of Pentecost (Premota 4-5). The story of Babel at first glance seems to imply God's judgment in confusing their language to stop them from building the tower. Yet, a more detailed analysis of the text clarifies his strategy of creating multiple languages in order for humanity to scatter all over the earth by linguistic groups and so fulfill his mandate given to Adam and Eve in Genesis 1.29.

The biblical narrative presents the diversification of languages as a response from God to humanity's total disregard of his mandate to fill the earth and govern it (Gen. 1.29). Instead of obeying the creation mandate, humans decided to "build a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth" (Gen. 11.4). They did not just disregard God's mandate, they actually planned to oppose it. Instead of going all over the earth to fill it and govern it, they decided to build one city and remain together. Their justification for

the project was to make a name for themselves and avoid being dispersed over the face of the earth. In other words, they chose to completely rebel against God's commandment. At this juncture, God intervenes and diversifies their languages to nudge them in the right direction of fulfilling his divine mandate.

Languages then were not a curse, neither were they an end in themselves. Instead, they were a necessary means to an end. Languages were God's way of guiding them toward the greater good while allowing them the freedom to choose where exactly to go. Humanity's lack of vision could not see anything good beyond the land of Shinar. Maybe the memory of the flood filled their minds with mistrust towards God and his mandate or maybe it was just the rebellious human heart thinking it knows better than the Creator himself. Regardless, they were comfortable where they were and simply wanted to stay there. They did not know they were able to navigate the seas, or that fertile lands to cultivate in the Nile Delta existed. They did not know about the rich biodiversity to govern in the Amazon, the opportunity to raise cattle in the Alps, or the Chaco and fish in the Pacific islands. Had they stayed where they were, they would have ended up fighting for limited resources instead of filling the earth with God's image and enjoying the beauty, diversity, and riches of his great creation.

The origin of languages at Babel is relevant to the metanarrative of Scriptures as it highlights the linguistic groups which split out of the original monolingual humankind and how those groups spread all over the earth to start different cultures and civilizations. The importance of this story for the current research is its relationship with God's work of salvation. Jesus affirmed, "God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3.16). The words

κόσμος (world) and πᾶς πιστεύω (whoever believes) leave no room for exclusions here. These words clearly state God's intent to offer salvation for all humankind, including every culture and every language on earth. Therefore, the sovereign God, who caused the diversification of languages and cultures, wants to offer salvation to all, and most likely he had a plan to engage these diverse cultures and languages with the good news of the Gospel in the fullness of time. The assumption could plausibly be made that the one who created multiple languages at Babel and provided the first simultaneous multilingual interpretation at Pentecost would have a purpose and a place for bilingual communication or communication with interpretation to spread the Gospel and advance his kingdom on earth.

This section considered the origin of languages at the genesis of humanity, and it would be suitable to conclude it with a look at the end of the story. A short review of the book of Revelation renders a view of multiculturalism and multilingualism present in worship at the feet of God's throne. People from different nations, tribes, and languages worshipping the Lord together in what appears to be the most diverse worship service in history.

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the lamb! (Rev. 7.9-10)

The specific mention of nations and languages here at least implies God has no intention to abolish the rich cultural diversity of humanity even in eternity. Noticeably, at

the very end of the book in Revelation 22.2, the nations remain present, but no mention occurs of languages anymore. The tree of life, hidden after the fall in Genesis 3, reappears giving its “leaves for the healing of the nations” (Rev. 22.2). The word nations here comes from the Greek word ἔθνη which could be translated as ethnic groups or cultures. The mention of the nations at the very end of God’s written revelation, could certainly support the continuity of human cultures in eternity. However, languages do not appear in Revelation 22. Some may argue that once evil is defeated, creation is renewed and the redeemed are safe with their Creator, a type of a reversed Babel miracle would bring all humans to speak the same language once again like it was in the beginning.

However, no biblical records exist to sustain the idea of God performing a reversed Babel type miracle to erase all human languages and linguistic consciousness to bring back a one common pre-babel language. In fact, most anthropologists agree on language and culture being so intertwined which makes it almost impossible to separate one from the other. Therefore, if there is enough evidence in the biblical text for God preserving the diversity of human cultures, thinking that the diversity of languages will also persist in eternity would be more plausible, perhaps as a great reminder to the redeemed of God’s great story of salvation. Like Paul affirmed to the Athenians, God made all cultures and nations from one man, Adam (Acts 17.26-27), and then he brings all nations back together in the one new man, Christ (Eph. 1.14-22). More importantly, an argument from a lack of reference in Revelation 22 does not give direct cause to assume an elimination of languages particularly since the beginning of the book seems to register cultures and languages continuing at least up to the worship in front of the throne of God.



Regardless of whether diversity of languages continue in eternity or not, what is clear in the biblical text is the diversification of languages at Babel was not a curse nor a punishment. Johnny Ramirez-Johnson suggests the one occurrence of the Hebrew verb בָּלַל (balel) commonly translated as confuse or confound could better be translated as mix or mingle. He then affirms God anointed them with languages to fulfill his plan. “When translated as anointed the action of the one occurrence of this particular verb form comes across as a remedy, a solution to a problem, not a curse or punishment” (Ramirez-Johnson 256). God’s divine intervention leads humanity to follow through with his mandate to fill the earth which would prepare the way for a covenant family to be chosen, a nation to be formed, and a Savior to be born from a virgin so he can bring eternal salvation to all those who believe from all nations. In which case, languages and interpretation become essential to the work of salvation and the ministry of preaching. As the apostle Paul says in Romans, for people from every culture to believe preachers have to be sent. These preachers will need languages and/or interpretation to preach the good news all over the world (Romans 10.10-15).

### **Bilingualism in the Beginnings of the Church**

Scholars disagree on which ought to be considered the first reference of bilingualism in the Christian church. Sang Lee points to the disagreement registered in Acts 6 between Hebrew and Greek widows as the first mention of the reality of bilingualism in the early church (182). Daniel L. Wong on the other hand makes a case for the story of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2 as the first reference to bilingualism (or polylingualism) in the Christian church. Wong notes that through the Holy Spirit, Hebraic Jews spoke in other languages to the various nationalities and languages represented

(Wong, *Intercultural Homiletic* 2-3). Jonathan Downie suggests that given the prominence of chapter 2 in the Acts narrative, it should be read as a declaration of intent as to the nature of the church (*Sermon Interpreting* 66). The narrative of Acts 2 establishes then the paradigm for ministry to others and lays the foundation for the Spirit-filled multicultural church although with no intentional participation of the church itself. However, Acts 6 describes the first intentional attempt on part of the church leaders to work out the dynamics of a bilingual community (Lee 182).

Determining how much Pentecost was in the mind of the early church at the moment they reached out beyond cultural and linguistic barriers in chapter 6 is hard. Yet, considering the way Luke frames the book of Acts, clearly, he is following the narrative of intent established in chapter 2. This can be endorsed by the concluding section in chapter 6 and the different terms used for “speaking in tongues” in chapter 2. Chapter 6 concludes the section “the word of God continued to increase and the number of disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem, and a great many of the priest became obedient to the faith” (Acts 6.7). This ending to the section seems to underline how reaching out beyond linguistic and cultural barriers by validating them in leadership did not cause the church’s growth to suffer. On the contrary, this action led to the church’s growth.

In Acts chapter 2, Luke uses two different Greek words translated as “language.” When reporting the events of that first Pentecost after Christ’s ascension, Luke notes the disciples spoke in other tongues (*glossa*). As he continues with the narrative, he quotes the response of the hearers of the phenomenon and reports them saying, “how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language (*dialektos*)?” (Acts 2.8; Immanuel). The reference to the same event using two different words presupposes intentionality. The

term *glossa* refers to the organ of speech or to a “distinctive language system.”

Etymologically, *Dialektos* comes from the preposition δια, meaning “through” and the word λέγω, “to say.” The word διάλεκτος then conveys the idea of the means or way in which one communicates something. The Concise Greek-English Dictionary defines two uses of the word διάλεκτος, “a conversation or discourse; a dialect or language used in a particular locality or by a specific ethnic group.”

A concordance review of the use of these two terms reveals that *glossa* is the term most commonly used throughout the New Testament to refer to diverse languages in a generic manner. *Dialekto*, on the other hand, is only used by Luke in the book of Acts and always having a form of ethnical link. So, for the people who understood what the apostles were saying the day of Pentecost, the phenomenon was not just about speaking a language they had not learned by themselves, but also the message was being communicated to them in their own heart language. The effect of hearing the Gospel in one’s own language can be bolstered by Luke’s choice of words in this passage. This is why Immanuel, following David McCollough, advocates for calling the phenomenon of Pentecost “xenolalia” rather than glossolalia (Immanuel 25).

After arguing on the role of bilingualism in first century Palestine, Lee concludes that the Jerusalem church should be designated as a bilingual community (183). He cites Hengel in referring to a broad list of bilingual people mentioned in the New Testament. He includes well known figures like Paul and Barnabas as well as less prominent figures like Johanna the wife of Chuza as well as others. These bilingual people played the role of translators-transmitters of the Jesus tradition between Aramaic-speaking Palestinian Jewish Christians and Greek-speaking Diaspora Jewish Christians in the Jerusalem

church. Even when Lee's purpose is to underline the Greek inference in the gospel story, his research does point to the decisive significance for the development of early Christianity as they bridged the linguistic gap between the groups of the Hebrews and the Hellenists.

An important element in the study of bilingualism in the beginning of the church is to notice the language of Jesus was Aramaic, yet the first written stories of his life are in Greek. The interpretative nature of the four Gospels speaks volume about the importance of translation for the transmission of the Christian message. Craig Evans looks at the influence of language in the Christian tradition (Evans 241). Of particular interest for this research is John Brown. Though his study is primarily lexical and philological in nature, his study reveals at various points the dynamics of translation in biblical language, starting with the vocabulary of Jesus. Brown cites several examples of transliteration from Hebrew - Aramaic - Greek as well as translation of Aramaic expressions into Greek to point to the challenges of properly communicating Jesus' message from Aramaic into Greek (Brown 240).

Both Evans and Brown in their analysis point to the reality of translation as never being literal and always having an interpretative component to it (Evans 182). Nevertheless, one can infer since all revelation comes in means and content from God, that it was always God's intention for his Son to be born and raised in an Aramaic speaking context, yet his message would be primarily transmitted in a different language.

### **The Multicultural Gospel**

The purpose of this project was to examine the effectiveness level of bilingual preaching to communicate the message of the gospel to a multicultural church in North

America. As mentioned in the rationale for the project, the aim is to establish healthy multicultural churches to accommodate both immigrants from different nations and natives born in America. Before examining the methodology of preaching for said churches, the message itself must be defined. In order to view the message of the gospel to a multicultural church, a clear definition of the Gospel becomes necessary. Rice Brooks affirms the evangelist is first and foremost a preacher of the gospel. After explaining the marks of an evangelist in Scriptures, church history, and current missiological research, he goes on to affirm the message of the gospel must be preached in a way to account both for the biblical content, and the local context (*The Gift of the Evangelist* 23-24). In other words, the gospel is not just an eternal truth, but a public truth which needs to be contextualized to the reality of the audience to be effective in their particular context.

Brooks defines the gospel as “the good news that God became man in Jesus Christ. He lived the life we should have lived and died the death we should have died- in our place. Three days later he rose from the dead, proving that He is the Son of God and offering the gift of salvation to those who repent and believe in Him” (*Man, Myth, Messiah* 229). Later on, he argues that the gospel is the ultimate human right which every person deserves to hear and have a chance to respond to. He affirms the apostolic preaching and the early church preachers focused their message on the good news of the incarnation, death, and resurrection of the Lord (Brooks, *The Human Right*).

As memorable and as precise as this definition of the gospel is, this definition might not paint a full picture of the good news to a person coming from a non-Judeo-Christian background. The word redemption comes from the Jewish culture and it usually

refers to the repurchasing of a lost property by a close relative, paying the full debt on the property. Redemption definitely sounds like good news but owning a property in the first place would also be good news. For redemption to happen, someone must have been given a property, then after losing the property for whatever reason, they would need a close relative with the necessary means to redeem it for them. For those who come from a Judeo-Christian background, the idea of redemption is usually clear and has been passed down from one generation to the next. Questionable, those who do not come from a Judeo-Christian background may not be able to understand the gospel as defined.

Consider the possibility of defining the gospel as: *The good news that God created the universe out of nothing, culminating his creation with humankind whom he made in his own image, and endowed on them the gift of freedom of choice, which they used to rebel against him and live a sinful life apart from him. But God, loving his creation so much, launched his master plan of redemption which led him to become man in Christ, live a perfect life, die a crushing death on the cross to pay for all humanity's sins, and rise from the dead to provide eternal reconciliation with himself to all those who repent and believe in him.* Although this is a longer definition and not quite as memorable as Brooks' definition, this definition provides a better overview of the message needed to connect with a multicultural audience from a non-Judeo-Christian background.

People from Hindu, Buddhist, Muslim, or agnostic backgrounds need to hear about creation and rebellion before they can relate to the message of redemption and restoration in Christ. This big picture gospel defined above gives the preacher in general, and the preacher of a multicultural church in particular, an ample but necessary material

to work with. While explaining his definition of preaching, Harwood Pattison affirms the preacher should turn first to the matter of preaching. “Turning first to the matter of preaching, we say that it must be divine truth. We find here the limit and the extent of preaching, as well as its authority... Christian preaching is limited to the proclamation and enforcement of the truth of God” (Pattison 3). Just a few paragraphs later he affirms “the preacher is called to preach the gospel of Christ and not to lecture on literature or politics or economical questions.” (5) Pattison is equating the truth of God with the gospel although he clarifies the truth of God is the whole of Scriptures. Certainly, the Apostle Paul wrote at the end of his race: “All Scriptures is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Tim. 3.16). Even when this Scripture is a direct reference to the Old Testament canon, it can logically be applied to the entire Bible, both Old and New Testament alike.

For the purpose of this work, the word Gospel needed to be clarified. At La Casa church, the case study for this research, the gospel is presented more as the big story of God from creation to rebellion, to redemption, and final restoration. A curriculum named Foundations-CR3 (creation, rebellion, redemption, restoration) was designed by the church’s pastoral team to present the big picture of the good news to people coming from different nations, cultures, and religious backgrounds. This definition of the gospel by no means attempts to diminish or take away anything from the divine authority of every verse in the entire Holy Scriptures. This definition simply focuses the attention of the twenty-first century preacher of a multicultural church in North America on the big story more than on the many details of the redeemed people which constitutes a larger part of God’s revealed word. Every sermon and every series could be planned with this big story

in mind even when the book to be preached on is Leviticus, Proverbs, or the Song of Solomon. A focus on God's big story would help the preacher to present the good news in a compelling way to a multicultural, post-modern, post-Christian audience that has no prior reference of the context of God's great salvation offered in Christ.

### **Summary of Biblical Foundations**

The evidence presented in this entire section points towards a *Missio Dei* committed to reach every nation, tribe, culture, and language with the transformative message of the Gospel in order for them to form part of the redeemed humanity in eternity. The rapid expansion of the Gospel in the book of Acts from Jerusalem to Rome in approximately thirty years and the commitment of early Christians to preach the Gospel everywhere advocates for a sense of urgency to fulfill the mission. For such a vast mission of reaching all nations and cultures to be fulfilled (Matt. 28.19), the language factor must be dealt with. The expansion of the gospel all over the earth ultimately requires for the message to be translated into different languages. Even with the generalized use of Greek Koine in the first century world, the presence of bilingualism in the church as early as Acts chapter 6 (Aramaic-Greek) is indicative of the value of bilingual communication to solve problems and keep the unity of the church. These biblical and historical facts point toward God himself assigning a role for bilingual preaching or preaching with interpretation in the fulfilment of his plan of redemption.

### **Theological Foundations**

The purpose of this project was to examine the effectiveness level of bilingual preaching in communicating the message of the gospel to a multicultural church in North America. The statement of the problem showed considerable influx and growth of a



diversity of cultures in the North American landscape in recent years especially from the Latino Spanish speaking world. The question then arises of how to engage these cultures with the message of the Gospel in a relevant meaningful way. In attempting to answer the question, this project advocates for multicultural churches being a more suitable response from a biblical and theological stand point. The biblical foundations section of this literature review highlighted the following facts regarding the mission of God and multicultural churches. First, Jesus commissions his disciples to preach the gospel to all nations. Second, elements of multiculturalism were present in the church since its beginning. Third, the church of Antioch was the first fully multicultural church in history. Fourth, Acts focuses on the advancement of the Gospel among different ethnicities. Fifth, at the end of history, all nations are found worshiping the Lord together in Revelation. All these facts point towards God's desire for the salvation of all nations and for multicultural people to worship him together in unity. If God's vision for the future is Revelation 7.9-12, then multicultural churches are a more suitable environment to gather a diverse community of believers and prepare them for God's eternal purpose. Therefore, the following section will review the theological foundations for multicultural churches with a focus on the theme of diversity and the character of God, the mission of God, and the people of God.

### **Diversity and the Character of God**

The study of Theology is the study of God. Therefore, the theological foundations of any matter should be contemplated first from the perspective of God himself. The biblical foundations section of this literature review, after analyzing the origin of languages, established that God caused the diversification of languages at Babel to ensure

the fulfilment of his mandate to spread out, fill the earth, and govern it. When these linguistic groups separated, they formed nations and cultures as the biblical text affirms. Theologians and philosophers alike agree that culture usually revolves around a common language. Lesslie Newbigin, a theologian and a missionary, affirms culture is defined by the language through which a group of people grasp, conceptualize, and communicate the reality of their world (142). Observations like these imply culture and language have such a strong connection of causality where a common language causes a culture to form, and a formed culture exists and communicates through common language. If this is the case, and since God himself diversified human languages at Babel causing linguistic groups to separate from each other and form cultures all over the world, assuming God in his sovereignty had a design and a purpose for multiple cultures to exist and relate to each other would be reasonable.

Ramirez-Johnson argues, based on a proper linguistic interpretation of Genesis 1.28, that the Hebrew verb translated as fill the earth could be read as an imperative “be full,” and fullness should be interpreted as multiplicity of cultures. He then concludes all races were a part of the original design of God. “What I am affirming is that as part of God’s original pre-sin creation design, a diversity of races, ethnicities, personalities, and cultures was dreamed in the mind of God” (Ramirez-Johnson 253). The following subsections will briefly look at the theme of diversity in general revelation, special revelation, and the incarnation.

**Diversity in General Revelation.** Scriptures says one can understand, at least in part, the nature, attributes, and the character of God through the faithful observation of his creation (Rom. 1.20). If the creation and flourishing of multiple human cultures

comes from God's intentional design, this would indicate that he favors diversity over homogeneity. A careful observation of nature shows how the whole of creation attests to the value and joy of diversity. From the astronomic diversity of the universe to the irreducible complexity of the living cell, all creation seems to joyfully declare the Creator's intent of unity within diversity. James Gills defends the intelligent design of the Creator by explaining the components and functions of the cell and its DNA. The heart of his argument explains how the cell in itself is an irreducible complexity. The diverse components of the cell cannot come to exist in a step by step manner. All the cell's components have to be together at the same time for the cell to exist and function, and none of the components can live by itself. The cell is an irreducibly complex unit. The author further explains how one microscopic egg cell is fertilized by one sperm cell, and those two become one original cell carrying the necessary DNA for the formation of trillions of cells with over two hundred varieties, each having specific functions to form and sustain the different organs of the human body (Gills and Woodward 42-46). To the same argument, Broocks explains how evolution fails to account for all the diversity and complexity of life.

Though evolution is observed on a small scale, it fails to account for all the diversity present in the world. The fact that certain functions of life are irreducibly complex, meaning that they can't function without all the parts at once, points to the presence of an intelligent Designer. (Broocks, *God's Not Dead* 113)

Apologists, theologians, and even ecologists keep referencing the incredible diversity of the created order. Thomas C. Oden quotes Thomas Aquinas saying "God makes creatures many and diverse, that what is lacking in one is supplied by another"

(Oden 140). He then explains how the goodness of God willed to create a diverse world that expresses the glory and majesty of the Creator. The diversity of creation not only expresses the glory of God but gives him the opportunity to interact and enjoy his creation to the extent that each creature can handle. In addition, God creates intelligent beings who can enjoy the diversity of creation and enjoy a happy relationship with their Creator. “God offers us a higher happiness, ordered in relation to the proportional variety of goods more available to humans than any other creature” (Oden 141). Saint Francis Assisi affirmed diversity to be an expression of God’s creativity and benevolence. Lison K. V, reflecting on the spirituality of St. Francis, mentions how he observed “the presence of God in the diversity of created beings and his desire that humans should rejoice in this diversity and glorify God for it and with it” (Lison 103-06). One does not need to go to the jungle of the Amazon to witness the incredible bio diversity in the world. Diversity seems to impregnate every area of creation which would make diversity a clear and purposeful reflection of the Creator’s desires. In the constant debate between atheists, agnostics, and Christian apologists, the theme of science and scientific facts always come to surface. Yet, the universe cannot be explained solely by scientific means as if God was just a builder using mathematical equations to bring about his creation. If intelligent design is admitted, intelligent design must also be recognized.

Theologians for centuries have referenced God as a divine artist painting a beautiful canvas of creation. Noticeably, the beauty of art is in diversity. A painting of one color is less beautiful than one of many colors. Just like the colors of Autumn trees are more appealing than the steady green of a Summer forest. People do not drive long distances to view the summer leaves. God created diversity interwoven in each part of the

universe as an artist painting a canvas with many colors which come together to form a breathtaking image of beauty and wonder. The general revelation of creation certainly attests to God's favor and enjoyment of diversity. A vast diversity of colors, shapes, matter, and all living things including humankind which is the image of God himself. Yet this diversity remains within the limits and the laws he himself established and revealed to humanity since their creation at the garden of Eden.

**Diversity in Special Revelation.** God chose to reveal himself through his creation which speaks of his glory and design of the natural order. He then chose to reveal himself to humanity in a more specific way through miraculous means like visions, dreams, theophanies, and more specifically through the written word and the incarnation of the Son of God. Rudolph P. Boshoff, reflecting on the views of several contemporary theologians regarding general and specific revelation, quotes Norma Geisler saying: "while we recognize natural revelation gives us the understanding that a God is behind the created order sustaining it, the supernatural revelation brings the personhood and the will of God into focus" (Boshoff 8). "All Scriptures is inspired by God and useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and training" (2 Tim. 3.16).

The Scriptures contains the record of how God created humankind, and from the first chapter of the Bible the Scriptures emphasize he created man in his image (Gen. 1.28). The account of Genesis 1 declares how God created man and woman in his image, making no distinction of value between both yet clearly making a distinction of characteristics as one is called man while the other is called woman. God then orders the first couple to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth (Gen. 1.29). Ramirez-Johnson affirms that a better translation to fill the earth is (be full in the earth). He explains how

being full is to multiply into a diversity of colors, cultures, and ethnicities forming the big family of the human race (252). David E. Stevens argues all humankind is made in the image of God without exception of any biological appearance or cultural nuances. Not just each individual human is the image of God, but all the diversity of human colors, cultures, and ethnicities reflects the image of God (Stevens 55). Both authors, among others, seem to believe the diversity of human colors and cultures was a pre-sin vision in the mind of God. Brown, black, or mestizo are not a curse or inferior colors to white. Just like general revelation advocates for God's joy in the vast diversity of the universe he created, the Scriptures as God's special revelation affirm God's joy in creating intelligent beings who can carry his image all over the earth, an image, not limited to a color or a set of cultural rules deemed superior or holier than others. To the contrary, God rejoices in the redemption of mankind at the end of time when people from every nation, tribe, language, and culture are worshiping him together for eternity (Rev. 7.9-12).

The biblical foundations section of this literature review advocated for God intentionally diversifying humanity's languages at Babel to push them toward the fulfilment of his creation mandate. Theologians and missiologist like Newbigin, Ramirez-Johnson, and Stevens agree on the close relationship between language and culture. Wenying Jiang argues from a linguistic stand point that language and culture cannot exist without each other (Jiang 328-334). Therefore, believing that God diversified human languages not only to spread them all over the world but also to create the necessary conditions for diverse human cultures to form and develop wherever these linguistic groups went would be conceivable. Perhaps, as Ramirez-Johnson affirms, the divine mind always intended for multiplicity of cultures to co-exist and thrive in the world as a

greater expression of the creativity and imagination of the Creator (253). Just as an artist adds colors and shapes to embellish her painting, believing God caused both diversity of languages and cultures to embellish his creation and so manifest his glory would be reasonable. “The kingdom of God is like a mosaic. The beauty comes out of each piece being in its right place and contributing its colours – and all the pieces, in their magnificent colours, are needed for the mosaic to be a mosaic” (Kwiyani 11).

God’s special revelation in the written word advocates for the value of diversity from Genesis to Revelation. The entire metanarrative of Scripture emphasizes God’s intent to bless and prosper the many nations (*ethnos*) in the world. He called Abraham to be the father of a multitude of nations (Gen. 17.4). Today, over four billion people claim to be Abraham’s descendants (Jews, Christians, and Muslims). These people are from many cultures and languages, but they all claim the Abrahamic blessing. The Scriptures then, focuses on God’s election of Israel as his special kingdom to share his glory and his redemptive purpose with the rest of the nations. Israel was always supposed to be the mediator between God and the rest of the nations. God called them to be a kingdom of priests over all the nations (Exod. 19.4-5). A priest is essentially a mediator between God and people. Israel’s calling was to be the mediator through whom God brings all nations back to himself.

An important disclaimer here is to remember all human cultures are sinful in themselves as all humans are sinners by nature. Since the rebellion of Genesis 3, all the descendants of Adam and Eve live in sin and rebellion towards God. The biblical text does not advocate for God’s acceptance or celebration of human sinfulness, the Bible clearly condemns it. Therefore, the argument presented here for the value of diversity is

advocating strictly for diversity of cultures, colors, ethnicities, and languages. However, the argument does not advocate for other kinds of diversity as some parts of human society view it today. For instance, the Scriptures offers no validity to gender diversity beyond biological male and female.

The biblical text emphatically declares, “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (Gen. 1.27). The following verses establish the purpose of the two genders as for reproduction and multiplication (Gen. 1.28-29) while the next chapter adds the blessing of companionship, mutual help, and unity (Gen. 2.18, 23-24). When the biblical text affirms God created male and female in his image, not only is it affirming equality between both genders in the pre-sin condition, but also it is affirming God is neither male nor female. Instead, both genders together reflect the image of their Creator. Verses exist in Scriptures where God speaks as a father and other verses exists where he demonstrates the attributes of a mother. Timothy Tennent examines this subject in depth and concludes “Human beings, male and female, are regents of God’s presence, reflectors of the Trinity, signs of the covenant, reflection of God’s fruitfulness, conveyors of his grace, and icons of Christ and the church” (For the body 152).

### **Diversity and the Image of God**

In order to better understand the image of God in humanity and the kind of diversity it was created to portray, observing the original would be insightful. After all, an image exists to reflect something or someone. If humans were created to be the image of God, then it helps to consider the nature of God himself. However, a study of the nature of God and all his attributes exceeds the limits of this research. Yet, one particular



doctrine would be of great relevance to the issue of diversity in unity. The doctrine of the Trinity. For centuries, orthodox theologians have established the centrality of the doctrine of the Trinity to the Christian faith.

For instance, Oden, citing several theologians and church fathers, explains the doctrine of the Trinity by stating the Father is not the Son, the Son is not the Spirit, and the Spirit is not the Father while the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Spirit is God. The Triune God exists in three Persons with equal divine attributes and distinct personhoods (Oden 118-121). Stevens, in his interpretation of “let us make man in our image” (Gen. 1.26), affirms the statement is a direct reference to the Triune God who enjoys eternal fellowship with himself. He clarifies God is one in essence, yet exists as three persons. Furthermore, in referencing the Imago Dei in the creation of humanity, affirms “man as image exists - not singularly - but as two (man and woman) and then in relation to the many” (Stevens 49). Finally, he introduces the term “non-homogeneous Creator” though not in a heretical way since he reaffirms the doctrine of the unity of God but rather to highlight the existence of God in three persons who enjoy eternal community. To affirm three persons in the Godhead is to admit the distinctiveness of each person from the others while recognizing the unity and indivisibility of God. The Triune God who exists in eternal relational unity created a relational mankind in his image to live in unity among themselves (Stevens 49-51).

In reflecting on the Trinity, the image of God, and the rest of creation, some questions come to mind. There is plenty of evidence in the Bible and the reviewed literature to affirm God created diversity and enjoys it in all his creation from the microscopic cell to the vast galaxies of the universe. Both general and special revelation

declare God's favor and enjoyment of diversity. Furthermore, God as a master builder enjoys bringing diverse elements together to form a unified whole. "Then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature" (Gen. 2.7). Millard J. Erickson favors the term "conditional unity" in the discussion of the human nature. He affirms each human being is a complex unity of material and immaterial components. When these components are separated at death, the human ceases to be fully human till the day of resurrection when the immaterial is united with a new body to live again as a full human being (Erickson 554-57).

Wayne Grudem attempts to answer the question on the image of God by simply explaining the Hebrew meaning of the word "image" (*tselem*) and the word "likeness" (*demût*). After explaining both words, he concludes the sacred text was informing the original readers how man is like God and in many ways would represent God (Grudem 443). Following Grudem's definition of the image of God, and considering the relational community of the Godhead presented in the doctrine of the Trinity, assuming humankind like God is a complex unity would be conceivable. A complex unity is manifested in the individual making of every human being with material and immaterial components as well as the unity of man and woman in holy matrimony (Gen. 2.24), and "the solidarity of the human race in relationship" (Stevens 51).

The relational view of the image of God in mankind has its proponents and detractors. Gregory A. Boyd and Paul R. Eddy discuss the arguments of both sides. They explain the strongest evidence for this view is when Genesis 1.27 and 5.1-2 declare God created them in his image, male and female he created them.

To exist in the image of God is to exist in intimate loving relationship with others, epitomized here and throughout Scriptures by the love between a husband and a wife (cf. Genesis 2:23-24). Just as God's essence is a loving "us", humanity's essence is to be a loving "us". We are fully human only in community. (Boyd and Eddy 107)

The Apostle Paul boldly proclaimed in the Athenian Areopagus "he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth" (Acts 17.26). The word for nations here again is the word (ἔθνος), better translated as ethnic groups. Paul in this text is clearly affirming God created all ethnic groups from the original couple, and the original couple was created in the image of God to live in loving community with each other. Therefore, God created all ethnic groups in the world as his image so they can live in a loving community. Multiple authors agree on this view as a pre-sin conception in the mind of God (Kwyani; Stevens; Ramirez-Johnson).

The human rebellion at the garden of Eden and the consequences following the fall have distorted the image of God in humanity. Furthermore, the Bible shows how much the image of God was distorted after the fall by narrating the way humans treated each other and related to their Creator. Instead of living in a loving community to image the Triune God and represent him to the rest of creation, humans began to attack each other, kill each other, enslave each other, and segregate from each other (Gen. and Exod.; Gen. 43.32), hence, the need of redemption and salvation to restore the broken image of God in mankind and to bring together a diverse community of believers to worship their Creator and live eternally with him in a loving community (Rev. 7.9). This glorious ending of the story seems to be the righteous fulfillment of what was intended in the

beginning when God created an image to reflect him and represent him to the rest of creation (Gen. 1.26-27).

Certainly, the Bible is a great part of God's special revelation to mankind, and what the Bible has to say about any subject is conclusive evidence of his divine will. Nevertheless, the clearest, fullest, and most precise revelation of God's nature and character is the Lord Jesus himself (Col. 1.15-20). When God became man in Christ, he revealed to humanity who God is, how he thinks, and what he values. Therefore, a discussion about God and diversity or multiculturalism must include a section on the incarnation.

### **Diversity and the Incarnation**

So far, this literature review emphasized God's original design for humanity. He intended for humankind to reflect his image to the rest of creation and govern it while living together in a loving community. Yet, the Scriptures narrate a very different story after Adam and Eve's defiance to God's commandment in Genesis 3. Biblical history and world history alike draw a picture of humans hating each other and committing all kinds of atrocities against each other. Even so, God did not forsake the human race entirely. Instead, he had a plan to redeem humankind and restore his relationship with them (John 3.16). The story of the incarnation is essentially a story of love and sacrifice. To redeem his fallen creation, God must enter his creation, live among them, and bring them back to himself. The doctrine of the incarnation of the Son is one of the most important pillars of the Christian faith. Given the highly important aspects of this doctrine and considering many of these aspects go beyond the purpose of this research, the following subsection

will focus only on answering the question: When God chose to incarnate, did He embrace homogeneity or diversity?

By definition, the term incarnation expresses diversity. The incarnation brought two distinct natures together in one person. “The word incarnation (Lat. *incarnates*; Gk. *sarkosis*) means enfleshing, or becoming flesh, the union of human nature with the divine in one person” (Oden 265). Therefore, the incarnation of the Son of God brings about a scandalous emphasis on diversity. First, the divine and the human natures uniting in the person of Christ. Then, as Oden explains, Christ honors both genders (male and female) as he is born male, yet acquires his human nature from a female. Classical exegetes affirmed that for both sexes to be rightly and equitably involved in the salvation event, the Savior needed to be a male, as he could only be birthed of a female, since males cannot give birth (Oden 266).

Orthodox theologians have agreed for centuries on the union of the two natures of Christ as key to the incarnation and to his mission as mediator between humanity and God. The Apostolic creed, The Nicene creed, the Chalcedonian creed, and the teaching of the early church fathers all agreed on what was called the ‘hypostatic union.’ The term basically meant Christ is one person with two natures that are united because they both belong to the same person, and this one person is the Son of God, the mediator between God and man, and the agent of human redemption (Macleod 188-89). Some theologians go even further by affirming that for Christ to be a true mediator between God and humanity, he had to have both natures in himself otherwise he could not empathize with each side (Oden 278). Two natures in one person is a clear example of diversity in unity. The incarnation of the Son of God clearly embraces diversity in unity much like the

Trinity where each person of the Godhead is not the other but all three persons are the One eternal God. Inferior, but striking similarity is found in creation with the irreducible complexity of the cell being one unified cell yet formed of distinct indivisible components.

A brief review of the genealogy of Christ in the Gospel of Matthew would render another layer of diversity to the incarnation: ethnic diversity. This is true even though the genealogy establishes Christ's Jewishness by tracing his human bloodline to king David who was promised a son to sit on his throne forever and to Abraham the father and founder of Israel (Yancey 50-51). Matthew remarkably includes four females in the genealogy of Christ. Three of them certainly did not belong to the nation of Israel. Tamar the Canaanite, Rahab the former prostitute from Jericho, and Ruth the Moabite. Curiously, the only female not mentioned by name is Bathsheba. Instead Matthew mentions her in Christ's genealogy as the wife of Uriah. Andrew D. Heffern presents two theories of why Matthew includes females in his genealogy which was uncommon at the time. One theory is in regards of the sinfulness of these women and so demonstrating that the Messiah offers redemption to all sinners. The other theory was they were types of Marys to highlight the scandalous virgin birth. Finally, he debunks both theories and favors the one sustained by Ambrose and other church fathers who defended the incorporation of these four women to showcase the admission of the gentiles into the church. Three of these women were clearly not of Hebraic descent (Tamar, Rahab, and Ruth). When the Gospel writer refers to the fourth woman as the wife of Uriah the Hittite (gentile), this reference could be his attempt to group her with the other gentiles to emphasize God's eternal purpose to save all nations in Christ (Heffern 80-81).

To establish a gentile presence in the genealogy of Christ is to utterly affirm his ethnic diversity. The Jewish Messiah was not purely Jewish after all even though Matthew writes his Gospel primarily to a Jewish audience and makes every effort to present Christ as the Messiah as R.T. France mentions in his commentary (France 20, 41). Matthew is the one to include Gentiles in his genealogy account. He is the evangelist who shares the story of the heathen wise men from the east who were led by a star to come worship the king of the Jews born in a manger (Matt. 2.1-11). Matthew also is the one who mentions the holy family's flight to Egypt and their return to semi-gentile Galilee (2.19-23; 4.15). All these references do not seem to be coincidental. In an account written to prove Jesus' Messianic claim, it seems strange and even counterproductive unless of course Matthew was purposefully signaling the multiethnic diversity of Christ to affirm he is Savior and Lord of both Jews and Gentiles alike.

In summary, when God chose to incarnate, he chose to be conceived by a female and be born as a male to honor and include the two genders in the salvation event. Through the miracle of the incarnation, he joined the divine nature of the Son to the human nature of Christ in one whole person. He broke down the dividing wall between Jews and Gentiles in his multiethnic genealogy, his flight to Egypt, and his upbringing in Nazareth. Finally, during his incarnation, Jesus was most likely multilingual. Based on a study of the languages spoken in the first century Palestine and the stories presented in the gospels, many scholars believe Jesus spoke at least Aramaic, Greek and Hebrew. Hughson T. Ong explores several hypotheses of the sociolinguistic makeup of first century Palestine. After a well sourced analysis, he reaches the conclusion that Jesus was multilingual: he spoke Aramaic to his inner circle, Greek in public circles, and Hebrew

within the religious circles he frequented. In addition to a few words in Latin as evidenced in his response to Pilate (Matt. 27.11; Mark 15.2; Luke 23.3; Ong 5).

To summarize, this sub-section explored the theme of diversity and God through the witness of general revelation, special revelation, and the incarnation. The literature reviewed so far corroborates what was found in the biblical foundations section. God created diversity purposefully; he weaved diversity into all his creation and takes great joy in it. The diversity of the universe, the bio diversity of planet earth, and the diversity of human cultures, ethnicities, and languages are all a product of God's grand design. In relation to humankind specifically, they were created in the image of the Triune God. He created them as male and female to live in a loving community which would reflect him and represent him to the rest of creation. Just like an artist adds color to her painting, God created the diversity of human colors, cultures, and ethnicities to embellish his world with them. Therefore, diversity is a blessing not a curse in which case, building multicultural communities of believers in preparation and anticipation of the great assembly of Revelation 7 would be worth every effort. To follow this last thought, the next section will explore the relationship between cultural diversity and the '*Missio Dei*'.

### **Diversity and the Mission of God**

Many definitions exist for the Latin term '*Missio Dei*' and missiologists abound in their description of what is the mission of God. Perhaps the simplest and most important concept to grasp is it is in fact the 'Mission of God.' The people of God do not have a mission, God has a mission, and he invites his people to join him on his mission to restore his creation. If God has a mission and his people are called to join him on his mission, then knowing and understanding the mission is of great relevance. Another



theme which seems to run parallel in the entire metanarrative of Scriptures is the theme of blessing. God begins his revelation to mankind by blessing them (Gen. 1.28), and he ends it with a blessing as well (Rev. 22.14). Those two themes, mission and blessing, seem to run together from the beginning to the end. In fact, the theme of blessing seems to antecede the mission. If the mission is to reconcile the broken creation, then it certainly began after the fall while the theme of blessing appears in the account of creation itself unless the mission is not just to reconcile the world back to God but to bless all of creation through the image of God, and when the blessing was interrupted by human rebellion, then God activated the restorative plan of his mission.

Therefore, instead of fixating on the definition of the *Missio Dei*, exploring those two themes in the big picture of Scriptures would help. Christopher J. H. Wright explains how biblical theology can trace a line from the tribes, languages, and nations (Gen. 10-11) who stood in need of redemptive blessing to the great multitude of people from every tribe, language, and nation of Revelation 7 who stand redeemed and blessed in front of God's eternal throne (7:1). Whether the mission is to bless his creation or restore the lost blessing provoked by the fall, God is on a mission, and his mission would probably be spelled out clearly in the first chapters of his special revelation to humankind.

The previous sections of this literature review gave special attention to the first eleven chapters of the Bible. Genesis 1-11 is the beginning salvation history and establishes the foundations of how the Creator envisioned and established his creation. The grand opening chapters of creation describe God's original intent and design. Chapter 3 brings light to human rebellion and how the rebellion threw the world into array. Humanity's rebellion against their Creator brought radical brokenness to all the

relationships established in creation. Man and woman hide from God in shame and guilt. The animal and plant worlds are impacted, and the soil itself is cursed by God. A bleak image indeed, especially in comparison to the beauty and wonder of the previous two chapters.

The following chapters (4-11) describe mankind's increased rebellion and sinfulness alongside repeated examples of God's grace. Cain kills Abel, God judges him but also protects him. Seth is born, and people began to call on the name of the Lord again (Gen. 4.26). When human sinfulness reaches a 'point of no return,' God's judgment comes in the form of the flood to end all life on earth but a few. The following chapters show God's grace to save his creation in Noah's ark and the subsequent renewal of his covenant with humankind (Gen. 9.1-3). Once again, God blesses the human family with a similar blessing to the one given to Adam and Eve in the creation narrative (Gen. 1.28). Noticeably, both times the term blessing appears in these first chapters of the Bible, it refers to fruitfulness, multiplication, and filling the earth (Gen. 1.28, 9.1). God establishes his covenant with Noah, confirming he will never end life again by a flood (Gen. 9.11-17).

Sadly, humans did not keep their end of the covenant; once again they rebelled against God at Babel (Gen. 11). God intervenes, diversifies their languages, and forces them to spread and fulfill his original purpose as have been thoroughly discussed in the biblical foundations section. Wright recounts the narrative in a similar manner, and he concludes "Genesis 1-11 poses a cosmic question to which God must provide a cosmic answer" (Wright 65). Indeed, the first 11 chapters of the Bible establish the framework for the entire story of redemption. Fixing the brokenness introduced in the world by the

human fall takes from Genesis 12 to Revelation 22. Yet, in these chapters the purpose of God is clearly manifested. He created humankind to bless them and through them to bless his entire creation. This explicit blessing was manifested to both Adam in the garden, and Noah in the post-flood earth. “Blessing, then, at the very beginning of our Bible, is constituted by fruitfulness, abundance and fulness on the one hand, and by enjoying rest within creation in holy and harmonious relationship with our Creator God on the other” (Wright 67).

Wright also clarifies, the theme of blessing in biblical theology is set within the context of relationships. God’s blessing is manifested when humans are in good relationship with him, and blessing is something for them to share with other humans (Wright 67). When these relationships are interrupted, and when God’s purpose is distorted by humanity’s fall and continuous rebellion, he activates his cosmic answer. God’s answer to human rebellion is a mission. A mission to reconcile the world to himself so the blessing of creation can be restored and continues to flow through all eternity. Yet, seeing God’s mission in the light of the whole Scriptures is important. God was not simply reacting to human fallenness as if it took him by surprise. Instead, as the apostle Paul clearly states in Ephesians 1.4, he had the plan of redemption prepared even before the creation of the world.

God then, is on a mission to accomplish his purpose in creation. His mission includes revealing his glory to all mankind and reconciling to himself people from every nation, culture, tribe, and language (Blackbay and Willis Jr. 55). Eddie Arthur brings a trinitarian perspective to the discussion. To him, the mission of God is an overarching purpose to restore the relationships which were there in the beginning of creation. “The

Trinitarian God desires to see a people living in communion with each other and with himself and to bring about reconciliation in a broken cosmos” (Arthur 2).

**The Abrahamic Blessing.** Don Richardson, Christopher Wright, and other missiologists believe the mission of God truly begins with the call of Abraham. God’s answer to the defiance of the human race in Genesis 11 was to call an old, childless couple in the land of Babel to become the conduit of his whole mission of redemption (Wright 66). When God calls Abram, he calls him to two ends: First, to bless him and make him a great nation. Second, through him, to bless all the nations of the earth (Gen. 12.1-3). This great covenant comes in the immediate context of the separation of the linguistic people groups which resulted in the formation of many nations and cultures. Therefore, this action could suggest that the same God who diversified their languages at Babel, giving the necessary conditions for many cultures to form, now is directing a special blessing through Abraham to every culture formed (Richardson 141).

In essence, the Abrahamic covenant is a promise of blessing. God promises to bless Abraham, make him a great nation, and through him bless all the nations of the world. Richardson calls these two promises “the top line and the bottom line” (138). First, God calls, sets apart, and blesses Abraham himself. The mission of God usually begins with a calling to be set apart. Abraham was called by God to leave his land and his family and go to the land God will show him. He was not even told exactly where to go (Gen. 12.1). Interestingly, God called Abraham to leave his country, culture, and his kindred to go and be a foreigner in another land, a land he did not know about, but a land promised to be an inheritance for him and his children. The blessing promised was to be

fulfilled while he was a foreigner among other cultures. The top line then was to bless Abraham and his direct descendants by setting them apart as God's special people.

The bottom line is what pertains more to the purpose of this research. In the Abrahamic covenant, God promises under oath to bless all nations through Abraham. He clearly declares his purpose of spreading the blessing he bestowed on Abraham to all the families of the earth. "Thus, the blessing of Abraham becomes self-replicating. Those who are blessed are called to be a blessing beyond themselves" (Wright 68). The election of Abraham was never meant to be just for the sake of himself and his direct descendants. God is on a mission to reconcile all nations to himself. He is after restoring his image broken in the fall. All humankind is the image of God, inclusive of every ethnic group and nationality (Stevens 55).

A quick survey of the Old Testament would render the idea of God dealing exclusively with Abraham and his direct descendants in the form of the nation of Israel. A more detailed observation would showcase a different outcome. Richardson recounts the many instances where Abraham and his children are a blessing to the nations. Abraham himself witnessed to Canaanites, Hittites, and Philistines. Joseph was a blessing to Egypt and saved it from destruction. The Hebrew spies blessed Rahab and her family sparing their lives. Moses blessed his Midianite father-in-law, Jethro. The stories go on and on till the time of the prophets who even during the exile brought the word of the Lord to the nations around them (Richardson 142-43). Even when God showed up on Mount Sinai, he decided to reveal to Israel their real mission. They were called to be a kingdom of priests (Exod. 19.6). A priest in the whole of Scriptures is someone who stands in the gap between God and man. Therefore, if the entire nation of Israel is a

kingdom of priests, this clearly refers to their standing in the gap between God and the rest of the nations.

Therefore, calling and blessing one man and through him spreading the blessing to all the families of the world seems more consistent with God's character, nature, and mission. God called Abraham, and in him Israel, not just to bless them exclusively but to restore them and bless them so abundantly they would in turn spread his blessing to all nations (Wright 71). Even when this blessing to all nations is not seen highlighted in the history of Israel, through them the One who brings the blessing to all nations is born. God's mission to bless and restore the lost blessing in the fall finds its greatest manifestation in the incarnation, life, death, and resurrection of the Messiah.

**The Messianic Blessing.** Paul begins his letter to the Ephesians by expressing gratefulness for God's blessing: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ" (Eph. 1.3). The themes of blessing and mission are found hand in hand all over the meta-narrative of Scriptures. However, both themes find their maximum expression in the incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and eternal kingdom of the Messiah. On the one hand, his life, death, and resurrection are so linked with God's promise to share the blessing of Abraham with all nations on earth (Richardson 150). On the other hand, Jesus was anointed Messiah to mediate between God and man. He was anointed for a mission. He came to fulfill the mission of God by reconciling in himself all things in heaven and on earth (Col. 1.20; Oden 365).

The Messianic blessing is way more than his sacrificial death to atone for humanity's sin. Jesus came to manifest the fullness of God's love (John 3.16) by

fulfilling the office of the perfect prophet, performing the sacrifice of the priestly office, and “inaugurating the full manifestation of the kingly office” (Oden 366). A fixation on his death and resurrection would be a partial view of the great work of redemption. Christ came to accomplish the will of the Father and bring his mission to its climactic end by teaching as a prophet, dying in priestly sacrifice, and ruling as a king. In all these offices and throughout his mission on earth, Jesus showed an inclusive embrace of all nations.

As discussed in the sub-section on the incarnation, Jesus came from a mixed genealogy of Jews and Gentiles. Among the first to celebrate his birth were both the Gentile wise men from the east and the Jewish shepherds from Bethlehem (Matt. 2.1; Luke 2.8-16). As a baby, he was taken to Egypt till the death of Herod (Matt. 2.14). When he moved back to Israel, he lived in semi-gentile Galilee (Matt. 4.15). Jesus began his ministry in Galilee, yet bordering Syria. He preached in Samaria (John 4). He healed the son of a Roman centurion (Matt. 8.5-13). He taught that Gentiles will come from the east, the west, the north, and the south to join Abraham in the kingdom of heaven (Luke 13.29-30). He risked the mob throwing stones at him when he mentioned the story of the Elijah and the Gentile widow of Zarephath and Elisha healing Naaman the Syrian (Luke 4.25-29). In summary, Jesus, the Jewish Messiah, talked a lot about the salvation of the gentiles as much as the salvation of Israel (Richardson 153).

The Messianic blessing, is not only to fulfill the mission of Israel’s redemption but also to extend the Abrahamic blessing to all nations. The ushering of a new covenant of grace in Christ allows all those who believe to be adopted into the family of God (John 1.12). The Messianic blessing of the covenant of grace is shown all over the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus. He extended blessing to everything and everyone around him,

with rare exceptions for specific reasons (see the fig tree in Matthew 21). He taught on what it is to be blessed in the beatitudes (Matt. 5.2-12). He blessed the little children (Luke 18.16). He blessed the bread and multiplied it to feed the multitude. He blessed Peter for his confession of faith (Matt. 16.17). Jesus expressed best his understanding of his mission and the blessing he came to extend in his priestly prayer in John 17. The summary of his prayer is for all believers from all nations (John 17.18-21) to be in such unity as the Father and the Son are in unity. Jesus came to restore humanity from the defiance of Babel into the blessing of the gathered assembly in worship of Revelation 7 (Wright 46).

Probably one of the most relevant blessings Jesus conferred was when he breathed on his disciples and told them to receive the Holy Spirit (John 20.22). This particular blessing and its timing are of great relevance to this research. Douglas. W. Balzer, writes a thesis on the exegesis of this text. At the end of his exegetical work, he concludes John is consistent with the creation motif he began his gospel with. The similitude between this text and Genesis 2.7 are remarkable. He argues John is portraying Jesus as the agent of creation, the giver of the breath of life. Jesus' action here should be viewed as the inauguration of a new creation and the establishment of a new humanity (Balzer 89).

With one breath, God brought the old creation to life. Jesus with one breath brought the new creation to life. This amazing blessing would be significant in itself. Yet, the Scripture narrative does not end there as soon after this event Jesus gathers these same disciples he breathed on and commands them to carry the blessing to all nations of the world (Matt. 28.18-20). Noticeably, Jesus reminds them he has all authority in heaven



and on earth. Then he commissions them to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

**The Mission Continues.** Since the beginning of creation, God is on a mission, a mission to bless his creation and to restore what was broken by humanity's sin and rebellion. First, he chose Abraham to bless him and through him bless all the families of the earth. Then he blessed Israel, the direct descendants of Abraham, so they can be a kingdom of priests and bring the Abrahamic blessing to the nations and by doing so further the mission of God. In the fullness of time, the Son incarnate came to bring the mission of God to its highest climax with his crucifixion, death, and resurrection. Jesus did what no one else in heaven or on earth could do for the mission of God. He paid in full for the sins of humanity, and by his sacrifice as the man-God restored the broken relationship between God and humankind in the garden. Christ reconciled the two parties in himself and brought the mission of God to its final stage. Now all humanity has to do is to hear and accept the terms of the new covenant in Christ. Therefore, the mission continues by Christ sending his ambassadors to all nations of the world, not just Israel, to share the good news and invite all people groups to accept the terms of reconciliation.

Craig Keener argues that Jesus does not spring the theme of the nations on his disciples last minute. In fact, Matthew brings the theme of the gentiles all along the way in his gospel. The opening genealogy introduces four Gentile related women (Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba). Jesus soon goes to minister in Capernaum (Galilee of the gentiles; Matt. 4.15). He delivers a demon possessed man from a gentile region (8.28-34). He heals the servant of a roman centurion (8.10). He affirms many gentiles will be joined to Abraham in eternal life (8.11). He heals the son of the Syro-Phoenician woman who

was part of the ruling Greek class urban citizens (15.21-28). He declares to his disciples the end will not come until the good news is preached to all nations (24.14). Then comes the great commission where clearly and plainly Jesus sends them to go and make disciples of all nations (Keener, *Matthew Missiology* 4-9).

Since the day of the Great Commission, Jesus' followers have become the agents of the *Missio Dei*. God is still on a mission. He just appointed Christ's disciples to carry out his mission in the world till the day of final consummation. The mission of God today and for the past two thousand years has rested on the shoulders of the church, not a particular church or denomination but the universal church of Jesus "the church, then – that multinational community that include believing Jews and gentiles – is the people chosen and called in Abraham to be God's people" (Wright 72). The mission continues with the church carrying the Abrahamic blessing and sharing the Messianic blessing of a new covenant of grace and reconciliation to all nations on earth.

Therefore, the mission of God is intrinsically diverse in nature. From Abraham to the church, God's mission explicitly demands for all nations to be included. Including all cultures, languages, and ethnic groups in the mission is not an option but rather a commandment. From the metanarrative of Scriptures and the elements of mission surveyed, no mission exists without God, his people, and all the nations they are called to include. The book of Acts and early church history point to the same understanding of the mission. Richardson affirms how many ancient cultures have redemptive bridges back to the Creator. These redemptive bridges are common knowledge in each culture pointing to the Creator and providing a way for his mission to engage them with the Gospel. In the

words of the apostle Paul, “In past generations, he allowed all nations to walk in their own ways. Yet, he did not leave himself without witness” (Acts 14.16-17).

**The Mission Accomplished.** A survey of the mission of God in the metanarrative of Scriptures necessarily leads to the fulfillment of God’s purpose and plan. Revelation 7.9-12 brings a glorious image of people from all nations, languages, and tribes worshipping God together in unison. The presence of the nations not only in the final redemption but even in eternity is highlighted by the reappearance of the tree of life in Revelation 22.2. The leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. The author does not explain how the leaves work, neither does he elaborate on what the healing means, but he makes sure to affirm the nations are present at the very end of God’s story. Wright believes the nations presence in Revelation 22.2 is a confirmation of God keeping his promise to Abraham, to bless all nations through him and bring them together in Christ to form part of the new reconciled creation for eternity (77). Mission accomplished indeed, and even when this is a past tense verb referring to a future event, it still holds true as in God’s economy, the revealed future is as true as the remembered past.

### **Diversity and the People of God**

Any local church community presence, vision, and mission ought to be grounded in a proper ecclesiology. Only when the very existence of the church is theologically grounded, the practices of a particular congregation can be properly evaluated in light of the biblical definition and theological understanding of the mission of the church. Scriptures uses different motifs to convey the nature and mission of the church. Oden notes that historically three main complimentary ways to look at the church exists: the elect people, the body of Christ, and the communion of the saints. Each of these three

motifs emphasize a different aspect of the church. The first one highlights conversion, the second unity of apostolic teaching, and the third one social service (Oden 692). Oden also notes whenever a particular church tradition has overstressed one at the expense of the others, the church has lost its healthy equilibrium.

The evangelical movement has traditionally stressed the importance of personal conversion as a mark of the assembly of the believers. Such emphasis has been made even at the expense of communal underlining of the church. “Persons are not saved in isolation but within a fellowship knit together by its common bond of union with Christ” (Oden 703). Furthermore, when individualized salvation is the only or major aspect to be counted as the mark of the church, individuals tend to gather in places where their personal needs are met not where the true identity of the church is reflected. Out of search for personal fulfillment rather than mission fulfillment, people gather with those who are like minded and their personal views are never challenged.

The unity of the church does not merely require a compromise here and there for the sake of peaceful coexistence. As Thiessen puts it, “communion among those who are ‘others’ is a mark of the church, and not a mere concession to a situation of imperfection” (7). The first major crisis in the church during the New Testament period was related to an issue in which ethnicity played a central role. The first council of the church in Acts 15 had to decide on crucial issues that would allow Gentiles converted to the Christian faith be joined to the church which had started predominantly monocultural. The issues discussed were not as much soteriological as they were ecclesiological. The decision was not if Gentile believers needed to do something to ensure their salvation but rather what kind of practices were antithetical to their new identity as followers of Christ. Tennent

notes “the prohibitions [established by the Council of Jerusalem] served to visibly separate the Gentiles from their former religious identity as pagans, since all four of these requirements are linked to common pagan practices of the time” (Tennent, *Theology* 204). On the other hand, the determination of the Council implied that Jewish Christians would have communion with uncircumcised Gentiles. The decisions of the Jerusalem Council aimed at the unity within the diversity of the church. “The church will retain multiple cultures and lifestyles, but there will always be only one body of Christ” (Tennent, *Theology* 204). The whole point was both Jews and Gentiles would live out their common faith based on their new identity in Christ.

### **Summary of Theological Foundations**

This section reviewed the theological basis for multicultural churches, from the perspective of God, his mission, and his people. Theology proper literature advocates for God’s love and enjoyment of diversity. The Triune creator of the universe included diversity in all his creation. God created humankind in his image not only each individual human but all colors, cultures, and ethnic groups are created at the image of God. Furthermore, God diversified human languages at Babel, giving the necessary conditions for linguistic groups to separate and move together to a geographic location where they started cultures and civilizations. God is the initiator of human cultures, and the many cultures are a better reflection of his creative nature.

Since the beginning of creation, God is on a mission to bless everything he created (Gen. 1). The theme of blessing was briefly surveyed throughout Scriptures alongside the theme of *Missio Dei*. The literature reviewed show how these two themes run parallel in Scriptures from the calling of Abraham (Gen. 12.1-3) to the final

restoration of all things in Revelation 22. God is on a mission to restore the blessing broken by human rebellion at the garden of Eden. His mission goes from Abraham to Israel, to the incarnation of the Son of God to bring eternal reconciliation between God and man. The God-man, after expiating the sins of humanity and reconciling all humankind to the Triune God, handed the mission to his disciples so they can go to every nation, tribe, and language sharing the good news of salvation in Christ.

The people of God are viewed as a multicolor, multiethnic, and multilingual diversity from all nations. After overviewing God's promise to Abraham to bless all nations through him, Christ's great commission is to go and disciple every nation and the presence of all nations at the throne worship service in Revelation 7.9-12. Concluding that God created human diversity to be celebrated and enjoyed is both theologically and biblically accurate. Furthermore, the unity of humankind is best manifested in the unity of the church which is the body of Christ. As one body has different members which do not look alike yet they are united in the one body. So, the church has diverse people united by Christ himself. Therefore, multicultural churches are not a luxury but a necessity to better express God's nature, character, mission, and vision of his people.

### **Bilingual Preaching in Church History**

This section briefly reviews the presence of bilingual preaching throughout church history. Christianity started in the Aramaic speaking areas of Judea and Galilee. Christianity then rapidly grew throughout the Greek and Latin speaking Roman empire. This growth necessitated translation. Lamin Sanneh, as an African scholar, analyses the importance of translation for Christianity. He looks at the history of Christianity and affirms "Christianity is a translated religion, without translation there would be no

Christianity or Christians. Translation is the church's birthmark as well as its missionary benchmark" (Sanneh, *Whose Religion* 97). Later, he conducts a theological analysis of the interaction of the gospel with the different cultures and languages. He concludes:

Christianity affects cultures by moving them to a position short of the absolute, and it does this by placing God at the center. The point of departure for the church in mission... is Pentecost, with Christianity triumphing by relinquishing Jerusalem or any fixed universal center, be it geographical, linguistic, or cultural, and with the results of there being a proliferation of centers, languages and cultures within the church. Christian ecumenism is a pluralism of the periphery with only God at the center. Consequently, all cultural expressions remain at the periphery of truth, all equal in terms of access, but all equally inadequate in terms of what is ultimate and final. (Sanneh, *The Gospel* 598)

The versatility and resiliency of the Christian message caused it to be a message of inclusion in a diverse and stratified society. In the first century when Christianity arrived to Rome, "the majority of city inhabitants were not born in Rome... and what was true for the city population as a whole applied even more to the early Roman Christians" (Lampe 20). Rome was one of the most "multicultural" cities in antiquity. In the immigrant culture of early Roman Christianity, Greek was used as the main language (27). In the second century, a language shift started in the city and the church. While Greek was the dominant language of the educated Christians in Rome, a rather uncultivated Latin was being used by some lower-class Christian circles in town. However, by the first half of the third century, Latin and Greek were already equally represented on the catacomb inscriptions. Both Latin and Greek could be used as

liturgical languages until the fourth century. Bilingualism slowly faded from the second half of the third century onwards. Noticeably, the shift to monolingual Latin in the Roman church, seems to have opened a gap between the western and eastern church provinces in the Roman empire (27).

In the earlier times of the medieval era, sermons given to the common people were delivered in the vernacular whereas sermons to the clergy were preached in Latin, but both were written down in Latin, the official language of the clergy. Later in the medieval era, the same written medium is used for sermons addressed to either of the two audiences, and this written medium is not pure Latin but a mixed language (Wenzel 107).

For Christians, translation is an acknowledgment that languages have intrinsic merit for communicating the divine message. They are worthy of God's attention (Sanneh, *Whose Religion* 100). The fact of Christianity being a translated, and translating, religion places God at the center of the universe of cultures, implying free coequality among cultures and a necessary relativizing of languages vis-à-vis the truth of God. No culture is so advanced and so superior that it can claim exclusive access or advantage to the truth of God and none so marginal or inferior that it can be excluded. All have merit; none is indispensable. The vernacular was thereby given the kiss of life.

### **The Multicultural Church**

With the view of Revelation 7.9, holding on to the model of monocultural churches, or even arguing for the homogenous unit principle for that matter, seems antithetical. Donald McGavran's theory for church growth was born out of a sincere desire to increase evangelism and bring the gospel to all people on earth. Both McGavran and Peter C. Wagner advocated men prefer to stay within their homogenous groups. The



church should let them do so and reach them within their groups with the message of the gospel. The idea is basically to remove all possible obstacles, thus allowing people to accept the gospel and commit to a local church faster. The church growth movement favors churches to grow in numbers and to grow fast. Nevertheless, this theory has several missiological and ecclesiological challenges.

Bruce. W. Fong explains eloquently all the logic behind the homogenous unit principle. After going through biblical theology, practical theology and historical arguments, he concludes the HUP theory misinterprets Jesus' great commission and the biblical doctrine of the unity of the church. Real unity requires intimate participation and universal acceptance of all God's children (Fong 116-27). Renee Padilla, a well-recognized Argentinian theologian, demonstrates that biblical evidence points in the opposite direction of McGavran's theory. Padilla concludes the HUP is not essential for missions and does not rest on solid biblical ground. "All the new testament evidence points in the opposite direction, namely in the direction of an apostolic practice whose aim was the formation of churches that would live out the unity of the new humanity in Jesus Christ" (Padilla 10).

The evidence found in both the biblical and the theological foundations sections of this review point in the opposite direction to McGavran's theory and the church growth movement. The big story of the Bible shows God on a mission to bless every nation and bring them into the community of one new multicultural, multilingual humanity. The literature examined does not point to God being in a hurry. On the contrary, he is taking all the necessary time and effort to get the job done. Reaching people with the message of the gospel is a huge part of God's mission but is not the

whole mission. The mission of God is to restore all his broken creation and bring humankind back together in unity to better reflect his image as he purposed in the beginning of creation (Wright; Oden; Ramirez-Johnson; Stevens; Kwiyani).

Nevertheless, no biblical evidence exists against healthy church growth. In fact, God created all living things to grow. Plants, animals, and humans, if they are healthy, are created to grow. Jesus, in the parable of the growing seed, explained how the kingdom of God grows. The sower sows the seed and, without knowing how, the soil produces grain by itself (Mark 4.26-29). Growth is part of life and the church of Christ is alive so it should be expected of any healthy congregation to grow. Multicultural churches are no exception. The growth might be slower at times due to the toiling of the soil, or it might be fast like in the church of Antioch (Acts 11).

Christian A. Schwarz shares the results of his research conducted in over a thousand churches in thirty-two countries from the different continents of the world. The research yielded four million responses. He argues numerical growth is the wrong goal. Instead, a church should aim to be healthy. Healthy organisms always grow. There is no need to tell a baby to grow. All a mother needs to do is to keep her baby healthy and well fed, and he will grow. Through his research, Schwartz identified eight essential qualities for a healthy growing church:

1. Empowering leadership
2. Gift-oriented ministry
3. Passionate spirituality
4. Functional structures
5. Inspiring worship service

6. Holistic small groups
7. Need-oriented evangelism
8. Loving relationships (22-37)

Orthodoxy and orthopraxy find their common ground in the local church. A biblically grounded ecclesiology teaches the many components of a local church's orthopraxy. A church's orthodoxy would highlight the centrality of the message of the Gospel to everything the church is and does. Schwarz's research focuses on the orthopraxy of a local church which would produce a healthy environment where natural growth can happen. Steve Murrell advocates for the centrality of discipleship to everything the church does. He basically says disciple making churches are healthy and growing churches. A focus on discipleship in the local church deters divisions and keeps the aim at fulfilling the great commission. Murrell presents an effective process for discipleship based on his experience as the founding pastor of Victory Church in Manila, Philippines: Engage, Establish, Equip, and Empower. This four "E" process is a continuous circle beginning with engaging non-believers and walking them through the process till they are empowered to engage other non-believers, establish them in the faith, equip them to lead, and empower them to engage others (Murrell 90-92).

Both Schwarz and Murrell advocate the principles each has discovered in their practice of ministry are universal and applicable to any local church. Healthy churches grow by reaching new people constantly. Discipling churches grow as they equip and empower disciples to lead and multiply into other disciples. Even if all these principles were transferrable to a multicultural church, yet another challenging factor still exists for multicultural churches. People from different cultures have vastly different levels of

understanding the central message of Christianity. The word Gospel does not mean the same thing for an Afghani refugee as it does for a Latino immigrant or a fourth-generation German descendant living in the United States. Therefore, multicultural churches should have a clear understanding of the message needed to engage each culture in their midst with God's eternal, unchanging truth.

Even when all the evidence points towards multicultural churches to be a better representation of God's nature, character, and mission, many challenges exist to the practice of a multicultural church in general and in North America in particular. In fact, many challenges exist to simply be a church in North America in this twenty-first century culture. Wong mentions Paul B. Pedersen's definition of multiculturalism "a wide range of multiple groups without grading, comparing, or ranking them as better or worse than one another and without denying the very distinct and complementary or even contradictory perspectives that each group brings with it" (Wong, *Multicultural Preaching* 1). He then explains, North America has many cultural groups like African Americans, Latin Americans, Native Americans, Asians Americans, and Arab Americans who usually group themselves in sub-cultures while the majority group, European Americans, usually see themselves as the macro culture. Regardless of the name or number of cultural groups, the fact is multiculturalism is an unescapable reality in North America.

Enoch Wan writes a fascinating paper on ethnic receptivity and intercultural ministries. Wan writes from a mainly Canadian perspective, but he himself admits the same principles apply to the United States since both nations are mainly immigrant-based nations whether it be recently arrived immigrants or native-born descendants of

immigrants. He makes a great point describing the differences between Anglo-European cultures who focuses on guilt/law and the more Eastern cultures who see life based on the honor/shame reality. This reality has direct implications on the processing of the gospel message being preached in a multicultural congregation considering some congregants are seeking to overcome shame while others are expecting to be absolved of guilt.

Preaching in a multicultural context would require the preacher to include different elements in the sermon to communicate the message of the gospel in an impactful way to her diverse audience.

Wan focuses on the hope of cultural integration between the new immigrant cultures and the older host culture (Anglophone) in North America. He argues that to evangelize and disciple such a huge variety of heterogenous groups, a multiplicity of church planting methodologies should be considered from the ethnic monolingual church which targets the first generation recently arrived immigrants of a particular group to the multicultural multilingual church inclusive to multiple cultures and multiple languages. His main point is the church should aim to communicate the message in an effective way. The methods can and should vary, but the objective remains to communicate effectively the message of the Gospel in order to produce life changing transformation in the culture (Wan 1-5).

The idea of integrating these immigrant cultures with the predominant host culture (Anglophone) is intriguing, especially considering the big gap of how Western and Eastern cultures tend to be impacted by a sermon. For instance, the balance between linear logic embedded in the host Anglo culture due to its Greek roots and the demonstration of power needed to persuade cultures from the global south is quite

delicate. Wan argues people who have been exposed to pain and suffering from evil forces and demonic oppressions are more receptive to the message of the delivering power of the gospel than the rational logical argument for the existence of God. This in itself adds complexity to the sermon in a multicultural church aiming for instance to include both Latino immigrants and Anglos from the predominant culture. The preacher would need to appeal to the sense of logic in his audience as much as the demonstration of the power of the gospel which his congregation needs to hear.

As previously discussed, diversity is a better manifestation of God's character than homogeneity. Multiculturalism is at the heart of God's mission as revealed in the final episode of God's big story. The people of God are from every nation, culture, and language. Therefore, the global church is multicultural in essence. When North America goes under the sociological microscope, evidences of diversity and multiculturalism growth abound. No signs exist of a slowing down of diversity in the North American landscape. All these observations are indicative of the importance of establishing true multicultural churches in North America. These churches have great receptivity and inclusivity for people from all cultures, ethnic groups, and even languages.

### **The Homiletical Framework for Bilingual Preaching**

This research set out to examine the effectiveness level of bilingual preaching in communicating the message of the gospel to a multicultural church in North America. The biblical and theological foundations explored the relevance and importance of multicultural churches from the perspective of God, his mission, and his people. This section reviews the homiletical challenges the preacher faces to deliver the message of the gospel in a compelling way to an audience that is ever growing multiculturally and

multilingually. The underlining assumption here is that a highly effective level of preaching contributes to the establishment and growth of multicultural churches.

The case study for this research is in North America, but a quick look around the world shows missiologists, missionaries, and cross-cultural preachers are facing the same challenges in most urban centers of today's post-modern, post-Christian world. People from different nations, different ethnic groups, and even different languages find themselves living in the same neighborhood, going to the same hospital, the same bank, and even attending the same church. How does the preacher in this incredibly diverse world preach the gospel in a relevant way? To answer this question, this section will present an overview of the definition and practice of preaching in general followed by a brief review of the dynamics of preaching at a multicultural church and ending with the intricacies of interpreted preaching in a multicultural church setting.

### **Preaching in General**

Many definitions exist of the term preaching. Even so, many in the field of homiletics agree a definition of preaching is not an easy task. Fred Craddock states "preaching itself is a very complex activity. So many are the variables that even arriving at a satisfactory definition of preaching is a continuing task" (16). Michael Quicke writes "preaching is such a slippery word that almost anyone can construct a definition based on his or her personal experience and preference..." (26). David B. Ward does not necessarily define preaching; instead he discusses the aim of preaching to affirm what he believes preaching does best, "to send a doxological community into the world by proclaiming the gospel in ways that teach, heal, save, and free" (34-35). Teresa Parish affirms preaching is more than the delivery of the sermon. In fact, she seems to agree

with William H. Willimon who said “preaching is actually a theological act, where we attempt to do business with a God who speaks, and God attempts to do business with us through words that we can understand” (2). Additionally, Parish asserts that regardless of what definition or form of preaching is preferred, every sermon contains four basic elements: Biblical text, preacher, listeners, and the Holy Spirit (Parish 19).

James D. Crane mentions several definitions of preaching, and then he chooses Harwood Pattison’s definition for its brevity and preciseness. Pattison defined preaching as “the spoken communication of the divine truth with a view of persuasion” (3). He then proceeds to explain each one of the three elements this definition renders. First, preaching is spoken communication. Second, preaching is of the divine truth. Third, preaching is for the purpose of persuasion. Pattison invests most of his attention on the preparation of the sermon yet, he offers some thoughts regarding the sermon’s communication itself which is more relevant to the purpose of this research. However, most of his thoughts are regarding the style of delivery and not necessarily the verbal and non-verbal components of communication. Crane borrows from Pattison’s definition and then structures his book to guide the preacher in preparing a sermon capable of achieving the goal of persuading the audience to respond to the purpose of the sermon. The majority of his book focuses on the homiletical and hermeneutical preparation of the sermon, but he adds a special emphasis at the end on the sermon being an arrow launched towards the audience’s emotions, intellect, and volition (Crane 26-28).

Crane writes in Latin America and to Latino preachers which is one of the reasons he gives more attention to the emotional aspects of the sermon delivery such as tone of voice, pause, volume, and body language. The author, based on cultural assumptions,



believes these aspects of spoken communication influence the audience's acceptability. This brings an important question to ponder on here which would later benefit the analysis of bilingual preaching. If preaching is a spoken communication task, what role does the body language, tone and gestures of the preacher play? Do these elements of communication add value to the sermon deliverability? In a further discussion, these same elements of communication should be examined in both preacher and interpreter, while considering bilingual preaching.

When reading Jesus' sermons or the sermons in the book of Acts, one can picture the preachers explaining the sermon with their hands and adding emphasis when needed with their tone of voice. For instance, Acts 2.14 clearly cites "Peter standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them." Jesus on the other hand, was a master story teller, in most of his preaching he included parables, analogies, and stories. Reading the gospels, Jesus is found preaching while he walks, sits, or even reclines at the table to eat. Hand gestures, tone of voice, and body language abounds in all his preaching as mentioned in the Gospels.

Fred B. Craddock gives many great insights into the practice of preaching. For instance, he affirms the preacher needs to be an interpreter of the listeners as much as of the text. To negotiate the distance between these two is central to the ministry of preaching (125). Craddock explains the various steps of sermon preparation. From interpretation of both text and listeners, to sermon formation, and finally sermon delivery. When talking about sermon delivery, he presents four factors to be considered prior to the preaching event. First, the place. The preacher needs to know and be comfortable with the space where the preaching event will occur to remove any additional anxiety at

the moment of delivering the sermon. Second, the liturgy. The sermon is not isolated from the whole worship service. Therefore, the preacher must be familiar with the order of service, preferably reviewed the night before, so he/she can prepare the heart for worship through the whole service. Third, materials taken into the pulpit. A wise preacher prepares beforehand what she will take to the pulpit, and have ready and at hand. Fourth, the preacher. The message and the messenger are experienced together by the listeners. Therefore, the mental, spiritual, and emotional condition of the preacher is of great relevance to the delivery of the sermon (Craddock 211-12).

A very relevant contribution of Craddock's New Homiletic is his insistence on the preacher developing a theology of preaching. The preacher needs to wrestle with the question of what is it he is doing in preaching. He affirms "preaching is understood as making present and appropriate to the hearers the revelation of God" (Craddock 51). Craddock translates the previous statement by stating that the preacher's calling is to implement in his preaching what he understood from God's revelation. To elaborate a personal theology of preaching, he recommends the preacher to consider three phrases "proceeding from silence, heard in a whisper, shouted from the housetop" (52). In summary, Craddock recommends preachers to value silence as revelation is more powerful when it breaks the silence. The noise of today's culture many times diminishes the preacher's appetite to the spiritual practice of silence. God spoke to break the silence, but silence was there for eternity before he spoke. God's revelation is not forceful but like a whisper to the ear or a tingle in the heart. Yet when proclaimed, God's revelation is shouted like the lion's roar with authority and confidence (52-65).

Ward explains the aim of preaching as “sending a doxological community into the world through the proclamation of the gospel” (24). Because the aim of preaching is to send a doxological community, its tones and modes mimic those of worship. Because preaching aims at community, it is best practiced together and not individually. Finally, preaching is sending, and to send one must maintain an outward focus. The preacher does good by keeping that aim in mind while preparing for preaching whether it be for a weekend service or a whole year preaching calendar.

With a clear aim of preaching in mind, Ward proceeds to explain the functions of preaching. He borrows three functions from St. Augustine of Hippo and adds a fourth based on observations made by homiletic theorists in recent years. The four functions of good preaching are to heal, teach, save, and free. Ward makes an important clarification by explaining how these functions usually overlap. Even when a sermon is focused on healing, good preaching would include a sentence here and there about the other three functions to keep the audience expectant for the next sermon (27-35). Another significant contribution to the field of homiletics is Ward’s analysis of the preacher’s being. He first defines contextual virtue as “a core of contextually responsive habits and intentions that enables a person to enjoy an intrinsically good way of life” (39). Then he proceeds to summarize four contextual virtues of a good preacher recurrent in homiletical literature through the centuries: centered humility, compassionate empathy, participatory wisdom, and courageous justice (38-77). He adds a special attention to the virtue of courageous justice, dedicating a full chapter to it. His definition of courageous justice seems ideal for multicultural ministry and for the preacher of a multicultural church: “Courageous justice

is the habitual valuing of equity for all people groups leading to increasing personal risk-taking on the behalf of others” (72).

To summarize, the different homiletical literature explains preaching as being a complex spiritual discipline. A good preacher should develop her own theology of preaching, cultivate the needed contextual virtues, clarify the aim of preaching, spend time in preparing each sermon, and practice frequently the proper delivery of the sermon.

### **Multicultural Preaching**

Today’s world is a multicultural one. Cities are filled with people from different cultures and ethnic groups. Many feel the need to learn how to live together even when they do not understand each other properly. School teachers, bankers, nurses, and bus drivers cannot simply assume the person in front of them understand what they are saying. Probably, this is one of the reasons why culture has shifted dramatically in the last fifty years to focus on acceptance, tolerance, and inclusion. Since humans are by nature self-centered and culture centric, governments in free societies feel the need to implement tolerance to all cultures and all ways of life as the roadmap to peaceful cohabitation. The problem is, like Josh McDowell signaled, tolerance becomes intolerant to anything and anyone who defies the acceptance of the equality of values and affirms the existence of absolute truth (18-20). This is the multicultural reality in which the twenty-first century preacher must stand and boldly proclaim the message of the eternal Gospel.

Matthew Kim shares these challenges; he suggests to today’s preachers that they must bridge the cultures around them to the culture of the text they are so eloquently bringing to life. Kim proposes a homiletical template to elevate the cultural intelligence

of the preacher and increase his/her awareness of the cultural sensitivities of the audience. Kim divides his template in three stages, each explained by an acronym. First comes the hermeneutic stage for which he proposes the acronym HABIT in order to interpret Scriptures with cultural diversity in mind without distorting the proper exegeses of the text (Kim 13-15). Habit is a clever way to present five necessary steps for exegeting the text. H = Historical, Grammatical, and Literary context. A = Author's Cultural Context. B = Big Idea of the Text. I = Interpret in Your Own Context. T = Theological Presuppositions (16-18).

The second stage of Kim's template to increase the preacher's cultural intelligence is to build a homiletical BRIDGE with the audience. B = beliefs. R = Rituals. I = Idols. D = Dreams. G = God. E = Experience. The culturally intelligent preacher must learn the beliefs of the listeners, identify the rituals observed and valued by the preacher's audience, locate the idols in their cultural context, unveil the listeners dreams, discover how do the listeners view God, and finally familiarize with the congregants' life experiences (Kim 19-23).

The final stage of the template concerns itself with the delivery of the sermon in a culturally sensitive way for which the author proposes the preacher should speak his audience's DIALECT. D = Delivery, custom made for each cultural context. I = Illustrations appropriate for the cultures being addressed. A = Application, balanced between personal and corporate. L = Language, common enough for all listeners to relate. E = Embrace people from all cultures and remove "we" versus "them". C = Content of the sermon to be relevant to the diversity cultures being addressed. T = Trust takes time to be earned. The preacher must be patient and consistent to earn trust from his

congregation (Kim 24-30). Kim's 3 stages template might seem intimidating to the reader, and it highlights his conviction of the degree of difficulty found in multicultural preaching. Nevertheless, he spends the rest of the book demonstrating the process is doable, and encouraging preachers to develop their cultural intelligence coefficient, in order to effectively reach the multicultural people walking through the doors of the North American church.

Daniel L. Wong notes the importance of rethinking ministry in terms of cultural diversity. He explains how intercultural homiletics recognize the cultural dimension in preaching while other ethnicities are present in the church. He then highlights the theological foundation for an intercultural homiletic which has been covered in the theological foundation section of this review. Finally, Wong presents some valuable insights for multicultural preaching. First, the key to an intercultural homiletic is that the person grows to be an intercultural preacher. Second, the intercultural preacher realizes the influence of culture on his own perspective. Third, a development of empathy and a marked understanding of the diversity present in the congregation exists. Fourth, the intercultural preacher partners with others for effective preaching before, during, and after the sermon. Fifth, the preacher uses simpler language and other communication tools to overcome the linguistic barrier of the different ethnic groups (Wong, *Intercultural Homiletic* 8-9).

Wong concludes by affirming the intercultural preachers' skills would increase as they interact pastorally with the different groups and members in their congregation. He then affirms that practicing intercultural homiletic is challenging. This practice requires more effort and preparation than preaching to a monocultural audience. Yet, to reach the

multicultural communities of the current North American landscape, intercultural preaching is inevitable (Wong, *Intercultural Homiletics* 8-9).

Justo Gonzales and Pablo Jiménez discuss the challenges of Hispanic preaching in North America. At first glance, the reader could wonder if this has anything to do with multicultural preaching. A thorough read of their book would confirm its relevance to the subject. Contrary to the Anglo understanding of Latinos or Hispanics, no such thing as one Latino culture exists. Latinos come from different nations whom in themselves are composed by different cultures. The cultural diversity of Latin American nations is one of the richest in the world. Therefore, even in a Spanish speaking congregation in New York, the reality of multiculturalism is present. “In the case of Hispanics, while in a sense we all belong to the same culture, in another sense there are within our community a vast number of cultures—which, for the sake of clarity, some call subcultures—reflecting our various countries of origin” (Gonzales and Jiménez 28).

Both authors focus on addressing the challenges of Latino preachers in the United States. Jiménez addresses the historical heritage of Latino preachers summarizing it in three stages. First, transculturation, where the homiletic theory arrives to Latin America hand in hand with Anglo missionaries in the early 1900s. North American missionaries needed to train local preachers and, therefore, translated three well known preaching manuals from English to Spanish. A fourth manual in large circulation all over the continent was written in Spanish yet by an American missionary in Argentina, being James D. Crane’s *El Sermón Eficaz*. The second stage is inculturation where local preachers with no access to formal homiletical education developed their own preaching styles based on their cultural understandings. The third stage is contextualization. In the

last three decades, Latino preachers have been developing a contextual theology to speak to the innate needs of their communities all over the continent. This stage is marked by its view of liberation theology and the importance of the freeing aspect of the sermon (Gonzales and Jiménez 4-14).

Gonzales focuses more on the cultural issues and the delivery of the sermon in the different contexts of Latin American churches in the United States. He describes several issues the Latino preacher needs to overcome. Among them is the issue of multiculturalism present in any given Latino congregation as well as the issue of segregation by the main culture and the sense of inferiority Latinos deal with on a daily basis. Also present is the issue of socioeconomic and political power where Latinos feel largely excluded from the centers of power in America. Another is the issue of immigration, present in the mind of every Latino, with a completely different perspective than their Anglo neighbors. Finally, the issue of identity needs to be considered. Some Latinos like to be identified as such, others run away from the stigma of being “others.” In most cases, Latinos have developed a bilingual, bicultural life style. The preacher needs to acknowledge the reality of bilingualism and multiculturalism in his audience (Gonzales and Jiménez 17-37).

In summary, multicultural preaching is complicated. Multicultural preaching has to consider several factors which preaching in general does not need to concern itself with. Nevertheless, given the sociological and cultural trends in North America, multiculturalism cannot be ignored any longer, and the wise preacher should develop the skill of multicultural preaching in order to properly engage his diverse congregation. Rebecca Ebersole observes “being ‘multicultural’ means creating space where every



culture can be expressed, learned from, and appreciated. The goal is to be more like a salad with distinct vegetables, than being a melting pot” (9). In the same way, multicultural preaching needs to include distinct ingredients to include, express, and appreciate the different cultures in the congregation.

To make things even more complicated, culture comes loaded with linguistic variations. Therefore, the tension the preacher feels when she is speaking to a multicultural audience is heightened when the audience is multilingual in nature. Even when the sermon is preached in plain English, the preacher realizes those in the audience for whom English is not their heart language are hearing a slightly different sermon from those whose first and only language is English. Preaching to a multilingual audience makes the task of preaching even harder. This occurrence of preaching is where interpreted preaching needs to be considered as a valid methodology of multicultural preaching.

### **Interpreted Preaching**

Preaching with an interpreter is hardly a new discipline. In fact, preaching with an interpreter has been practiced in the church since its beginnings as demonstrated in the biblical foundations section. However, interpreted preaching is a fairly new field of study with very little research. Teresa Parish examines the different dynamics of preaching with interpretation. She writes from her own experience as a bilingual preacher and interpreter as well as from vast research on the topic which leads her to very insightful findings. Perhaps, the most important of these findings is the role of the interpreter in the bilingual preaching event (Parish 224).

The effect and involvement of the interpreter in the sermon is a topic that is increasingly calling the attention of researchers. Jill Karlik, Alev Balci Tison, and Jonathan Downie in their respective papers categorize bilingual preaching as interpreting rather than mere translation. They distinguish translation from interpreting on the basis of immediacy and time pressure; therefore, categorizing bilingual preaching as interpreting. For Tison, translation occurs mainly from a written source where the translator has the chance to reread the text and review and adapt his translation for greater accuracy. She then uses Pöchhacker's definition of interpretation to state: "Interpreting is a form of translation in which a first and final rendition in another language is produced on the basis of a one-time presentation of an utterance in a source language" (Tison 12). Such immediacy and time pressure give greater weight to the background of the translator for his choice of words.

Interpreting can never occur in a social vacuum; therefore, interpreters are bound by the context in which they function. In the case of sermon interpretation, the interpreter has a unique role as he is part of the congregation as a receptor of the sermon even while he is interpreting it as a church member. The interpreter also experiences the message as a co-preacher. Jonathan Downie reflects on this reality by suggesting "This could begin with interpreters being encouraged to grow as co-preachers, extending to them the same kinds of training and support as are routinely available for preachers" (Sermon Interpreting 66).

The involvement of the interpreter is boosted by the sense of calling which many church interpreters have. Tison discovered that interpreters in church settings see their activity as a service to God; they see themselves as called to serve God with their

interpreting abilities and see interpretation as a long term “ministry.” This unique combination causes church interpreters to be more involved in the interpreting task than a professional translator would and makes them feel more empowered to interpret and reformulate the sermon in a way they feel is likely to be better understood rather than focusing on sticking closely to the original text.

Church interpreters are then an integral part of the preaching event. Downie argues for the necessity to place interpreting at the core of the preaching event not just as a conduit through which the sermon gets to be understood in another language but as a foreground of the multicultural and multilingual nature of the Church. The church that was born interpreting (Acts 2) ought to embrace its origins (Sermon Interpreting 66).

Intercultural homiletics will have to develop to build a new framework to accommodate to the new ecclesiastical reality. Daniel Wong appeals to the principles of intercultural speech communication to derive some conclusions regarding the skills a preacher must develop in order to effectively communicate interculturally. He affirms the single most important skill when communicating with a different culture is mindfulness (Wong, Intercultural Homiletic 4). The mindfulness he refers to is not only one of the listeners’ culture but of the preacher’s own culture, language, learning, and communication style.

Practicing intercultural homiletics is tremendously challenging and requires constant work and collaboration. Even the content of the sermon in any cultural setting ought to come from Scripture; the way the message is communicated needs to be adapted to fit the ways people from different cultures communicate. He notes how metaphors and illustrations can easily be lost in translation. An interesting point made by Wong is how a

person of mixed ethnicities usually sees herself in a particular way, often leaning to one of the two more than the other ethnicity (Wong, *Intercultural Homiletic* 4). This is important for the preacher and the interpreter, because if the interpreter speaks both languages, it means he will be culturally and linguistically “mixed” yet will have a self-description which identifies more with one particular language.

Many studies exist of the role of translation in Africa which can be very enlightening. Translation is the main mean by which the scriptures have historically been delivered in the largely unwritten languages of Africa. Jill Karlik, who wrote her PhD thesis based on the different dynamics of monolingual and bilingual services among Manjaku speakers and has broadly studied different options of interpretation in West Africa over decades, believes translation has broader effects than merely making a message understandable. Since most of the languages in West Africa are largely unwritten languages, even when the services are done in the vernacular of the different tribes, the reading of the Scripture is done in English with the help of an interpreter.

Karlik examines how the different options of interpretation have affected the multilingual milieu of West Africa. Her observations demonstrate that translation serves a broader purpose than making a message in one language known in another. For instance, in the decline of interpreting practices in a group of churches in Guinea-Bissau after the civil war, she noted their pastors insisted on offering the sermon in Kiriol (Portuguese Creole), the national *lingua franca*, to contribute to ethnic unity. Nevertheless, Karlik observed a rather more elitist dynamic emerged where those who actually are proficient in Kiriol have the upper position while those who have a different mother tongue fall

lower in the “leadership” scale and are being robbed from hearing the message of Scripture in their heart language.

Vigouroux, in her ethnographic study of a Congolese church in South Africa, observed how translation did not actually serve to bridge the communicative gap between two groups within the church but rather to provide a cultural framework for the church. When interviewing the pastor and some of the main interpreters, they all affirmed they translated the sermons from French to English in order to reach not only Congolese people but other African nationals, particularly South Africans. Yet, in the eight-year period of her intermittent observation of the church, Vigouroux noted most of the members were Congolese and all of them spoke French rendering the translation unnecessary. In her observation, the interpreter only partially translated the sermon, and then interacted with the preacher and the congregation. Vigouroux concludes that in such case, bilingual preaching functions as a pragmatic frame to legitimize both the translational ministry and the preacher himself (342). Comparing Karlik’s observations in West Africa with Vigouroux’s among the Congolese in South Africa raises the need for understanding best practices for interpretation in churches.

Tison also points out how interpreting can never occur in a social vacuum and interpreters are bound by the context in which they function. In that sense, she notes interpreting in a religious setting differs from professional interpreting practice in two main aspects: service and belonging. First, the interpreters in a church setting see their activity as a service to God and see themselves as called to serve God and, therefore, just like ordained preachers or pastors, the service of interpreting is a long-term and organized “ministry” that believers commit themselves to. Second, interpreters co-experience the

sermon even while they are interpreting it, because they are also the receivers of the message as church members. This unique combination causes the interpreter to be more involved in the interpreting task.

To summarize this section, all the research on interpreted preaching, or preaching with an interpreter, agrees that the role of the interpreter must be a prominent one in the preaching event. The agreement and chemistry between the preacher and the interpreter considerably enhance the quality of the sermon communication. When interpreted preaching is applied because the audience is bilingual, the intercalation between preacher and interpreter allow for both linguistic groups to receive the sermon equally and both feel included and appreciated equally. Considering most church interpreters are lay volunteers, providing them with training to improve their interpretation skills would be of great help. Downie recommends that the interpreter should be respected for his service and treated as a co-preacher of the sermon in which case preacher and interpreter could prepare and rehearse the sermon together, so when they walk on stage, they both own the sermon equally (Towards a Homiletic 68-69). When done properly, preaching with an interpreter, or bilingual preaching, is exciting and engaging to the audience. When done poorly, it is painful and distracting for everyone.

### **Research Design Literature**

This project was designed as a pre-intervention utilizing qualitative and quantitative research to examine the effectiveness level of bilingual preaching to communicate the message of the gospel to a multicultural church in a North American context. This research was based on a case study of La Casa Church in Nashville, Tennessee. After three years of bilingual preaching at La Casa, the researcher set out to

examine its effectiveness level, in order to determine if this preaching method is suitable for the specific context of La Casa, is central to pursuing the church vision, and is potentially reproducible for other multicultural church plants in North America. Tim Sensing affirms “No research methodology or data collection method gets the researcher out of the way” (41). Being the founding Pastor and the main preacher of La Casa, I recognize I am in the middle of this research with my own theories, biases, emotions, and values (Sensing 43). Therefore, a practice of reflexivity was applied throughout the research process, in order to be attentive and conscious of my own cultural, social, linguistic, and ideological perspectives (Sensing 44).

This study used a mixed method approach to examine the perception, sentiment, and opinions of both local congregants and external experts on bilingual preaching Spanish-English. John W. Creswell explains that mixed-method design is helpful “because of its strength of drawing on both quantitative and qualitative research and minimizing the limitations of both approaches” (218). Therefore, three data collection instruments were designed to measure how pastors, leaders, and key congregants at La Casa perceived bilingual preaching. Then their opinions were compared and contrasted with external experts in the field of cross-cultural preaching to draw conclusions on the benefits and challenges of bilingual preaching in order to discern the best practices to make it more effective in a North American context.

### **Summary of Literature**

The literature review for this research had five major categories. Each category addressed one or more issues reflected in the purpose statement. The five categories in this review were biblical foundations, theological foundations, bilingual preaching in

church history, the multicultural church, and the homiletical framework for bilingual preaching. The biblical foundations explored what a meta narrative of Scripture says about languages and cultures from their origin to the final restoration of all things. The biblical foundations also traced the theme of preaching in the New Testament from preaching in general to bilingual preaching within the early church in particular. Finally, the section ends by advocating for a multicultural gospel. The thought process explored how multicultural churches include people who never heard the story of creation and rebellion, and they would not have the necessary context to understand God's redemptive plan in Christ. Therefore, the message of the gospel to a multicultural church needs to include the whole story of God: creation, rebellion, redemption, and final restoration.

The theological foundations section focused on the value of diversity from the perspective of God, his mission, and his people. This section paints a picture of God creating and enjoying diversity in all of his creation. The thought process followed in this section points toward God diversifying human languages to create the necessary conditions for people to spread over the earth by linguistic groups and form diverse human colors and cultures. These cultures would then be redeemed by the Triune God through the incarnation of the Son who pays the price for humanity's redemption and sends his church to bring every nation, culture, and language to the great gathering of Revelation 7.

The third section briefly traced the presence of bilingual preaching in church history. The fourth section examined the multicultural church in general and in North America in particular. The section concludes by advocating for the importance of establishing healthy multicultural churches to embrace the great diversity of cultures,



ethnic groups, and languages prevalent in the North American landscape. Finally, the last section examined the homiletical framework for bilingual preaching which leads directly to the purpose statement of this study.

Several themes emerged in these sections which guided the direction of this research. First, the diversification of languages at Babel was not a curse from God rather a blessing to enable humanity to obey his creation mandate. When this story is compared and contrasted with the miracle of Pentecost in Acts 2, this story renders an image of God creating diversity of human languages to finally bring it together in unity through his Spirit. Second, the presence of cultures and languages at the end of God's story is indicative of his divine purpose to preserve human diversity in eternity (Rev. 7.9; 22.2). Therefore, if the aim is the great gathering of Revelation 7, then the church would do better today to be multicultural and multilingual in nature.

A third theme emerged showing how the blessing and the mission of God go hand in hand from Genesis 12 to Revelation 22. After examining the evidence presented, I could not help but to conclude God is restoring his blessing all over his creation through his mission to reconcile in Christ all things back to himself. God's blessing was interrupted in the garden by the curse of human rebellion, triggering God's mission to be activated by choosing Abraham through whom he blessed in Christ all the families of the earth first and the rest of creation last. If the mission is to reconcile all things and to spread God's blessings to all families of the earth, concluding that unity in diversity is a must and not a luxury for the church today seems more than reasonable.

A fourth theme that emerged is how bilingual preaching emerged as a method of reconciliation. From resolving the first church dispute in Acts 6 to the efforts of the early

church in practicing bilingual preaching to bring diverse people together, unity and reconciliation clearly have a high price. From a homiletical perspective, monolingual preaching to a multicultural church alone is extremely complex. Bilingual preaching comes to add another layer of complexity, but the high price of the practice is well worth the end result of unity in diversity.

The final theme which was further explored in this research is the role of the interpreter in the success of the bilingual preaching event. The evidence examined shows the interpreter as being more than just a helper to the preacher but more of a partner and a co-preacher who collaborates with the preacher to bring the sermon with equal effectiveness in both languages utilized. When the preacher and the interpreter work together as a team, the sermon is dynamic, the audience is engaged, and the hope for application is high which brings the question, what can be done to develop church interpreters to work alongside their preachers, and how to train preachers to elevate and encourage the role of the interpreter in the sermon delivery? The remainder of this research is aimed at answering these questions from the perspective of preachers, interpreters, and congregants at La Casa alongside the opinion of external experts in cross-cultural and interpreted preaching.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY FOR THE PROJECT**

#### **Overview of the Chapter**

This Chapter takes a more in-depth look at the design of this project. Chapter Three answers the question, “How will the researcher go about answering the research questions in order to examine the effectiveness level of bilingual preaching in communicating the message of the gospel to a multicultural church in North America?” This Chapter provides the reader a clear understanding of the data collection methods utilized in this project and the rationale behind their use. Furthermore, this Chapter gives the reader a deeper understanding of the participants, their context, and why they were chosen. Finally, Chapter Two provides the reader a step-by-step overview of how the data was collected and analyzed.

#### **Nature and Purpose of the Project**

This research was designed as a pre-intervention. The purpose of this project was to examine the effectiveness level of bilingual preaching in communicating the message of the gospel to a multicultural church in a North American context. In order to achieve this purpose, I designed an effectiveness scale for five categories to measure where bilingual preaching ranks in the perception of pastors, leaders, and congregants of La Casa Church. The first category is the viability of this preaching method. The second category is suitability for the specific context of La Casa. The third category is centrality of bilingual preaching to pursuing the vision of the church. The fourth category is desirability by the listeners in general. The final category is reproducibility and addressed

the question “Is this model reproducible, and if so, what are the best practices to implement it in other multicultural churches in North America?”

### **Research Questions**

The case study for this research is La Casa Church which is a multicultural, multilingual church in Nashville, TN. La Casa has adopted bilingual preaching as its only preaching methodology since it was launched in September 2019. After three years of planting this church, as its founding pastor I wanted to examine the centrality of bilingual preaching to the vision of the church. I also wanted to discern the best practices which could make bilingual preaching more effective. With that in mind, the purpose of this project was to examine the effectiveness level of bilingual preaching in communicating the message of the gospel to a multicultural church in a North American context. In order to achieve the purpose statement, three research questions needed to be answered.

**Research Question #1: In the opinion of pastors and leaders at La Casa Church, what are the characteristic components of the bilingual preaching practiced at its worship services?**

In order to examine the effectiveness level of bilingual preaching at La Casa Church, I needed first to establish its characteristic components from the view point of the church’s ministry team. Their view point would then be contrasted with the opinion of external experts interviewed later in the research process. La Casa Church has a mixed leadership team with pastors and leaders from different nations. Some of these leaders are monolingual, either English or Spanish. Others are bilingual English and Spanish. Still others have a different first language yet are proficient in English. For these reasons, the perspective of each one of them would bring an important understanding of how bilingual

preaching in Spanish-English is perceived. Another layer of complexity is the church has a preaching team approach to the pulpit. There are several preachers and interpreters. Some of them preach in English with a Spanish interpreter. Others are fully bilingual and capable of going back and forth between both languages.

In order to obtain the most reliable data, I shared an online open-ended questionnaire with each participant (Appendix C) and asked them to complete it online without sharing any personal data to keep their responses confidential. Since some of these leaders are from an honor/shame culture, confidentiality would help them to express their opinions clearly without feeling like they are dishonoring their pastors or other church leaders. The main aim of the questionnaire was to discern what the ministry team leaders consider to be the components of bilingual preaching at La Casa. The questionnaire had ten questions total. Questions # 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9, and 10 addressed the components aspect of bilingual preaching. The data collected from the questionnaire responses was then contrasted with the responses of the external experts' interview, specifically, question #2.

**Research Question #2: In the opinion of key leaders and congregants at La Casa Church, what are the main benefits and challenges of bilingual preaching?**

To further examine the effectiveness level of bilingual preaching at La Casa, it was necessary to discern the main benefits and challenges of this methodology. La Casa has practiced bilingual preaching in every service for the last three years and grew in that period of time from a small core team to over 150 people from twenty-five different nations. Therefore, concluding that category 1 of the effectiveness scale has already been

achieved at least a basic level of effectiveness is reasonable. Bilingual preaching is viable at a multicultural church in North America.

To measure the next three categories of the scale, I designed a two-phased approach. First, I selected three focus groups, as follows: Focus group #1 is composed of Spanish speaking church attenders. Focus group #2 was made of English-speaking members. Focus group #3 was composed of bilingual church members. In the first phase, each group met and discussed the questions prepared beforehand (Appendix D). Questions 1 to 6 aimed at discerning the benefits and challenges of bilingual preaching. In the second phase, I collected the discussion data from each focus group which represents a linguistic segment of the church. I added the answers to question 4, 6, and 10 from the ministry team questionnaire. Then I compared their answers with the responses to questions 3, 4, and 7 from the external experts' interviews. This triangulation allowed me to determine a more reliable scoring of effectiveness categories 2, 3, and 4.

**Research Question #3: What methods, practices, or ways of being would increase the effectiveness level of bilingual preaching at a multicultural church in North America?**

This research question aimed at discerning the fifth category of effectiveness for La Casa's bilingual preaching from external sources, being "Is bilingual preaching English-Spanish a *reproducible* model for multicultural church planting in North America? If so, what can be done to increase its effectiveness?" To answer this question, I selected six external experts. Three of these experts were preachers and interpreters who practice bilingual preaching regularly. The remaining three experts were scholars in the field of cross-cultural preaching. Each expert was interviewed personally to inform

this research of what can be done to increase the effectiveness level of bilingual preaching, particularly in order for it to become a reproducible model for church planting in North America (Appendix E).

### **Ministry Context**

This project is focused on a case study of La Casa Church located in Nashville, TN. La Casa is a multicultural, multilingual church with a vision to be a community of disciples making disciples from different nations. The bilingual name of the church (Spanish-English) reflects its identity. Nashville has a predominantly Anglo population, both Caucasians and African Americans, mixed with a growing immigrant population from different nations. However, the majority of the immigrant population is from Latin America, and they speak mainly Spanish. Many great English-speaking and Spanish-speaking churches in Nashville exist. Yet, due to the language barrier, Latinos who do not speak English remain isolated from the general population, especially when it comes to worship and church community. In addition, many Latino families are torn on where to go to church since the parents prefer to worship in Spanish while the children prefer English.

La Casa is part of a global movement of churches called Every Nation. The vision of Every Nation is to honor God by establishing Christ-centered, spirit-empowered, and socially-responsible churches and campus ministries in every nation. As part of this global vision, and with the spiritual heritage of reaching the nations and the university campus, the founders of La Casa envisioned a church where people from different cultures and languages can worship together, do life together, and make disciples together. La Casa is envisioned as a church where Latinos and Anglos would feel welcome and equally valued, a community where Latino families can worship together regardless of their language

preference. To pursue this vision and to accommodate both Anglos and Latinos in the same church, La Casa adopted a fully bilingual service approach since its beginning. The entire worship service, including the sermon, is conducted in two intercalated languages.

Currently, after three years of bilingual services, La Casa has an attendance of over 150 people from twenty-five different nations. The church is composed of Latino immigrants who speak mainly Spanish (roughly two-fifths depending on the week), their fully bilingual children (approximately one-fifth), other immigrant nationalities who speak English aside from their native language (approximately one-fifth), and Anglo-Americans who speak mainly or only English (approximately one-fifth). As a result, the diversity of languages and cultures is attractional and challenging at the same time as half of the congregation does not speak the language of the other half with a significant segment of bilinguals able to connect with all.

There are five age groups currently represented at La Casa: (1) Children (zero to twelve) form 20 percent of the church population; (2) Youth (thirteen to seventeen) 7 percent; (3) Young adults (eighteen to twenty-four) 20 percent; (4) Adults (twenty-five to forty-nine) 4 percent; (5) Mature adults (fifty to sixty-four) 13 percent. At the moment, the church does not have any senior adults (sixty-five plus) regularly attending. In addition, the church has a preaching team approach to the pulpit. Several speakers preach regularly. Given the bilingual nature of the preaching event, several interpreters to go hand in hand with each preacher. As the Lead Pastors of the church, my wife and I are the main preachers and interpreters. We are both fully bilingual and capable of code-switching between English and Spanish in the same sermon which we practice regularly. The other preachers are monolingual, and they preach in English only with an interpreter to Spanish. We count on



several bilingual volunteer interpreters whom we are equipping to improve their interpretation skill.

Finally, in order to pursue the vision of reaching people from different nations and students from several campuses in Nashville, the church needed to be centrally located near the campus area and the major highways of the city. Because of that reality, La Casa is not a suburban or neighborhood church where members live in close proximity to each other. Instead, church members come from all over the city. Most of them drive thirty minutes from their homes to church. As a result, the leadership team had to create alternative ways to foster community and relationships among people that live fairly far from each other.

### **Participants**

#### **Criteria for Selection**

To examine the effectiveness level of bilingual preaching in communicating the message of the gospel to a multicultural church, the participants for this study were chosen from three pools. The first pool was La Casa Church's ministry team leaders. All twenty-five members of the ministry team were invited and their participation was voluntary and confidential. These participants were selected based on their commitment to serve in the church's ministry team for at least two years and their understanding of the vision and the core values of the church.

The second pool of participants were regular congregants at La Casa who speak either English, Spanish, or both languages and who have been faithfully involved in church for more than one year. The faithful involvement aspect was determined by the following criteria:

1. Attendance to the weekend services of at least twice a month.

2. Participation in the four stages of the church's discipleship process.
3. Service in at least one area of church ministry.
4. Faithful giving to support the church vision.

The participants were selected based on the recommendation of the church's pastoral team and the pastors' knowledge of where each participant stood under the selection criteria detailed above. All participants were invited on a volunteer basis and given the option to opt out of the study at any time.

The third pool of participants were external practitioners and experts in the field of cross-cultural and interpreted preaching. These participants were selected based on their practice of bilingual preaching in other churches in North America or their scholarly work on the topic of cross-cultural preaching and interpreted preaching.

### **Description of Participants**

In order to answer the three research questions of this study, three groups of participants were needed. The first group is the committed leadership team of the church. This group is made of participants who have been serving in leadership at La Casa for at least two years and are well aware of the vision and the core values of the church. This was a very diverse group, including male and female participants between the age of twenty and sixty years old as well as participants who spoke only Spanish, only English, or both languages. Some of these participants were first generation Latino immigrants, others were native born Americans, and some were first generation immigrants from non-Latino countries. The education level of this group was also very diverse ranging from participants with high school education to post-graduate doctoral candidates.

The second group of participants were selected from people who have been attending church regularly for at least one year which gives them a fair exposure to the bilingual preaching methodology. The participants in this group were males and females between the ages of eighteen and fifty-five, both immigrants and native-born Americans. These participants were culturally diverse as well. These participants included Latinos, other immigrant nationalities, and participants born in the United States from several cultural backgrounds. This group of participants was subdivided into three language-based categories: (1) Participants fluent in Spanish; (2) Participants fluent in English; (3) Participants fluent in both Spanish and English.

The third and final group of participants in this study was composed of external experts in the field of preaching with interpretation. The participants in this last group were male and female preachers with post-graduate level of education. Some of them were bilinguals and others were monolingual who preached with an interpreter. These experts were also culturally diverse with some being Latinos, others Europeans, and others North Americans.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Each participant was given a written consent form outlining the data collection and confidentiality process, and had the opportunity to accept and sign it or decline and opt out (Appendix A). Because of the limited number of participants, determining “who said what” in a final reading of this research project may be possible. However, this study does not record the names of the participants, rather it identifies each participant with a code (i.e. Q1 questionnaire respondent # 1, FGE 3 focus group English # 1). The members of my research team who helped me with the data signed a confidentiality agreement (Appendix B).

Furthermore, I stored the collected data only on my password protected computer and committed to deleting the data within one year of the completion of this study.

### **Instrumentation**

I developed three researcher designed instruments for this study. The first instrument was the Bilingual Preaching Components Questionnaire. This open-ended questionnaire included qualitative type questions aiming at discerning the level of understanding of the characteristic components of bilingual preaching by the church's ministry team. The second instrument was the *Benefits-Challenges Focus Group*. For this instrument, I developed a set of seven questions to lead the discussion on the perception and understanding of bilingual preaching among La Casa's regular congregants. The same instrument was used among three separate focus groups:

(1) Monolingual Spanish participants; (2) Monolingual English participants; and (3) Bilingual Spanish-English participants. The third instrument was the Bilingual Preaching Experts Interview. This semi-structured interview was used to discern the opinion of external experts on the benefits, challenges, perception, and reproducibility of bilingual preaching in North America. The semi-structured interview had a total of ten questions, and their responses were used to contrast and compare the answers of the leaders and congregants of La Casa from the previous two instruments.

### **Expert Review**

Given the nature of the project, I opted for an expert review to validate the instruments designed. I sent the three instruments to three experts. First, Dr. David Ward who serves as Professor of Preaching for Every Nation Seminary, Senior Associate Pastor of Bethel World Outreach Church (a church within my movement), and a known

expert in the field of homiletics. The second expert was Dr. Ellen Marmon, PhD who serves as Director of Doctor of Ministry Program at Asbury Theological Seminary. The final expert was Dr. Milton Lowe who serves as Doctor of Ministry Consultant and Dissertation Coach at Asbury Theological Seminary. I asked them to review the instruments and give me their recommendations particularly on the validity of the quantitative and qualitative data the instrument was designed to collect. Dr. Marmon and Dr. Lowe are both experienced at guiding practical theological projects using mixed methods at the doctoral level. All three experts reviewed the instruments and sent me their feedback separately. I took their advice into consideration and adjusted the instruments accordingly to ensure their reliability and validity.

### **Reliability and Validity of Project Design**

This project utilized qualitative research to examine the effectiveness level of bilingual preaching. To this end, I designed three research instruments to measure the referenced effectiveness level. Since these instruments are researcher designed, I needed to address the reliability issue. According to Tim Sensing, “Reliability is problematic in the social sciences simply because human behavior is never static” (Sensing 219). The unpredictability of human behavior makes reliability challenging. Since the researcher in qualitative studies is the primary instrument” (219), and “the investigators always have to make judgment calls” (41). Therefore, to ensure the reliability of this project design and the instruments utilized, I made a judgment call to apply a mixed-methods approach which relied on the opinion of the external experts interviewed to interpret the data collected from both the questionnaire and the focus groups.

By triangulating the opinion of the external experts with the answers of the local leaders and congregants, I was able to validate the data obtained and properly rank bilingual preaching on the effectiveness scale designed for this study. The logic behind relying on the external experts' opinion was they were experts in the field of cross-cultural preaching with a vested interest in multicultural churches and bilingual preaching, yet none of the experts had an attachment or relationship to La Casa Church itself.

To further ensure the validity of these instruments, I decided to focus one instrument primarily on one research question. Then I added one or two questions in the other instruments as support to answer the same research question (RQ). For instance, the questionnaire was primarily focused on answering RQ #1. Questions #1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8, 9 and 10 addressed the components of bilingual preaching from the perspective of the leadership team. Then, focus group question 5 and 6 added the congregants' perspective on the matter and experts interview questions 2, 8, and 9 brought the experts' validation of these perspectives. The focus group was designed to primarily answer RQ #2. Yet, question #6 of the questionnaire brought the leadership perspective on the matter, and finally questions #3 and 4 from the experts' interview weighed in on these perspectives. Because of the nature of RQ #3, this question relied heavily on the experts' interviews. Yet, questions #5 and 6 of the focus group and questions # 8 of the questionnaire shed light on how the leaders and congregants at La Casa viewed the role of the interpreter which the literature affirms is a key player in the effectiveness of bilingual preaching. This information helped to propose practices and ways of being of bilingual preaching to increase its effectiveness level in North America.

### **Data Collection**

This study used a mixed-method qualitative research and utilized three different research instruments: Leadership questionnaire (LQ), Congregants Focus Group (FG), and external expert interview (EI). The goal of these data collection instruments was to elicit understanding and meaning, by seeking answers to questions in various social settings from “the individuals whom inhabit these settings” (Sensing 57). Each instrument was assigned to one group of participants as detailed below.

The first group of participants invited were the members of the ministry team of La Casa Church. These are committed leaders who have been serving at La Casa for two years or more. The team has twenty-five members total. The research instrument for this group was an open-ended questionnaire. To allow each participant to respond anonymously, I decided to administer the questionnaire online. First, I invited all ministry team members to a short meeting after Sunday service at church. I briefly explained to them the nature of the project and asked them to participate with their opinions in an online questionnaire where they can express themselves freely. Second, I handed each person a consent letter to read, sign, and date if they agree to participate in the research. I explained that their participation is completely voluntary, and they can opt out at any time without any consequences at all. I also made sure to clarify that any research involves some risk and benefits. Given the nature of the project, the potential risks were very minimum, and the potential benefits were very valuable. Third, I collected the consent letters from those who agreed to participate and sent them an email invitation with the link to the online questionnaire on Survey Monkey which also had the consent letter as the first page of the questionnaire. The email explained to them they had one

week to complete the questionnaire and it would take them between thirty and forty-five minutes to complete. The questionnaire also made clear the data was to be collected online through Survey Monkey. Fourth, once all participants completed the online questionnaire, I collected the data from Survey Monkey and downloaded it to my password protected computer. Each participant was given a code to highlight their answers as follows: Q #1 = Questionnaire Participant #1.

The second group of participants were key members and leaders at La Casa Church. These were twenty-one participants subdivided in three sub-groups: a group of participants who speak English only, another group who speaks Spanish only, and a third group who is fully bilingual. With the understanding that “the researcher in qualitative studies is the primary instrument” (Sensing 219), I met Sunday morning after church service with all twenty-one participants who were selected for this study according to the criteria detailed in the participants section of this chapter. At the introductory meeting, I explained the nature of the project, the time commitment for their participation, and what they were expected to do if they agree to participate. Second, I handed each one a consent letter and clarified that although their participation is needed, participation was completely voluntary and they can opt out at any time with no consequences at all. I also made sure to clarify that any research involves some risk and benefits. Given the nature of the project, the potential risks were very minimum, and the potential benefits were very valuable. Third, I collected the signed and dated consent letters from all those who agreed to participate and further clarified they would be subdivided in three language groups as follow: (1) English; (2) Spanish; and (3) Bilinguals. I also explained to them that their time commitment was sixty to seventy-five minutes in a one-time meeting, and



the meeting would be video recorded in order to capture their responses in detail later. Fourth, each of the three groups met for seventy-five minutes with me serving as discussion moderator. I asked each one of the seven discussion questions and observed the group members' response and interactions with one another. My phone was used as a camera to video-record the meeting and be able to collect the responses in private later. In addition, my other research team member took written notes and observations to clarify perceptions captured in the actual meeting versus on the video recording examined later. Finally, my research team member and I transcribed the data captured from the live meeting notes and entered the video recording observation into my password protected computer. Each participant was given a code to identify their answers in the research without referencing them by name. The code system utilized followed this pattern: EFG #1 = English Focus Group Participant #1; SFG #3 = Spanish Focus Group Participant #3; and BFG #5 = Bilingual Focus Group Participant #5.

The third group of participants were external experts in cross-cultural and interpreted preaching. Five experts were invited to participate in a personal Zoom interview to share their opinions on bilingual preaching. The data collected from these experts was used to triangulate the responses of the other two groups given that "triangulation is a method-appropriate strategy of founding credibility and trustworthiness" (Sensing 220). First, I invited each expert personally via email and attached a consent letter to the email affirming that their participation is voluntary and summarizing the minimal risks and the great benefits of their participation for this research. Second, after receiving the electronic acceptance with a signed and dated consent letter from each expert, we agreed on a date and time for the zoom interview. The

information was clarified to each participant that the zoom call would be recorded on in order for me to extract and transcribe their answers later. Third, at the beginning of each interview, I briefly explained the nature of the project and proceeded to the questions, giving the expert ample time to respond at will. The zoom interviews were recorded on my password protected computer, and after each interview ended, I reviewed the recording twice while transcribing the answers to my password protected computer.

### **Data Analysis**

The data collected for this project came from three distinct sources: the responses of the ministry team to the online open-ended questionnaire, the transcription of the interactions of the three focus groups, and the transcriptions of the external experts' semi-structured interviews. Four categories of data were established: (1) Components of bilingual preaching; (2) Benefits; (3) Challenges; and (4) Best practices. Each category was assigned a code to properly index it. Once the data was coded, the analysis process started for each one of the sources. I analyzed the open-ended, written responses using key word and phrase comparisons looking for recurring words or themes in the context of the questions asked which demonstrated the perceived components of bilingual preaching as well as the participants' perceptions of its main benefits and challenges.

Then I analyzed the transcripts of the Focus Groups using Documentary Analysis as suggested in Sensing. First, I read through all the data many times over a one-week period. Second, I analyzed the data looking for common themes, adopting a thematic approach to analyze the data as the purpose of the research was to examine the effectiveness level of bilingual preaching to a multicultural church. Components, benefits, and challenges of bilingual preaching were common themes that influenced the

data analysis of the focus group transcripts and the online questionnaires. Furthermore, the Focus Group data also provided the information to determine which components of bilingual preaching, if any, were more influential than others. I invested a good amount of time analyzing the Focus Groups data reflexively, understanding that I am a major contributor to the bilingual preaching event at La Casa both as preacher and interpreter.

Third, the data transcribed from the external experts interviewed was utilized to compare and contrast the data proceeding from the local church participants. The main purpose of the experts' interviews was to identify and discuss the areas of disagreement and silence in the findings of the data obtained from the local church participants. Then, the answers from these experts' interviews were utilized to fill the data category of recommended best practices.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **EVIDENCE FOR THE PROJECT**

#### **Overview of the Chapter**

The United States has a vast population of 62.1 million Latinos according to the 2020 census. Many of them do not yet speak English and continue to hold on to their native language and culture. In addition, a continual influx exists of first-generation Latino immigrants in North America whose first or only language is Spanish. However, the children of these immigrants usually learn English at school. Once they do, they prefer to communicate and even worship in English. This scenario creates a dilemma for many families. With the Great Commission in mind, a couple questions present themselves: How can the church effectively reach and disciple Latinos living in North America while giving them an opportunity to join the English-speaking majority? More importantly, what can be done to overcome the generational and linguistic barriers between parents and children in these Latino families?

As an attempt to respond to this missional opportunity, La Casa Church launched in September 2019 as a fully bilingual church with side-by-side bilingual preaching as the main distinguishing component of its weekend services. After three years of practicing this preaching methodology at La Casa, the purpose of this project was to examine the level of effectiveness of bilingual preaching in communicating the message of the gospel to a multicultural church in a North American context.

This chapter presents the findings of this study after surveying and interviewing different leaders and congregants at La Casa Church as well as external experts in the subject of cross-cultural and interpreted preaching.

## **Participants**

Forty-eight people in total participated in this study. These participants were divided into three groups. Each of these groups was evaluated by a different analytical instrument. The first group of participants were pastors and leaders of La Casa Church who had been part of the ministry team for at least two years. An online questionnaire was utilized to collect data from this first group. Twenty-eight leaders from the ministry team were invited and given the option to accept or decline. Twenty-one out of twenty-eight leaders completed the questionnaire within the allotted time.

The second group of participants were congregants who have been attending service at La Casa at least twice a month for one full year. The instrument utilized with this second group of participants was targeted discussion in the form of focus groups. Twenty-one congregants from La Casa participated in three different focus groups. One focus group was for English speakers only (FGE). Another group was for Spanish speakers only (FGS), and the last group was of fully bilingual participants (FGB). Eight participants were invited for each group. Seven out of those eight agreed to participate in the study. The total of participants in all three focus groups totaled twenty-one.

The third instrument was triangulation through external expert semi-structured interviews. Six experts in cross-cultural preaching, missiology, and interpreted preaching were interviewed individually. These experts were invited based on their expertise in the field and experience with bilingual preaching. All experts who were invited agreed to participate in the study.

The demographic profile of the forty-two individuals who participated in either the online questionnaire or one of the focus groups represent the larger demographics of

La Casa Church. They are between twenty and sixty years of age, a mix of males and females, single and married, English and Spanish speakers with a varying degree of education from middle school to postgraduate students. These participants were from fourteen different nations which is a fair representation of the congregation (see figure 4.1 and 4.2). All of the participants have been fully involved in La Casa by attending at least twice a month for over one year and engaged in an area of service. In addition, the twenty-one ministry team leaders have been committed to the vision of La Casa and exposed to bilingual preaching for at least two consecutive years.

## Male/Female Demographic

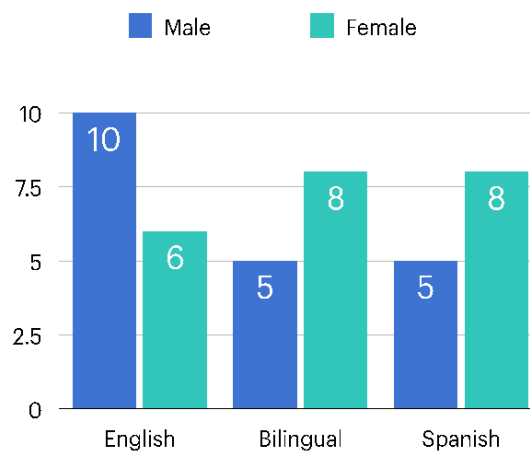


Figure 4.1

## Nationalities of Participants

- 42 participants from 14 different nations

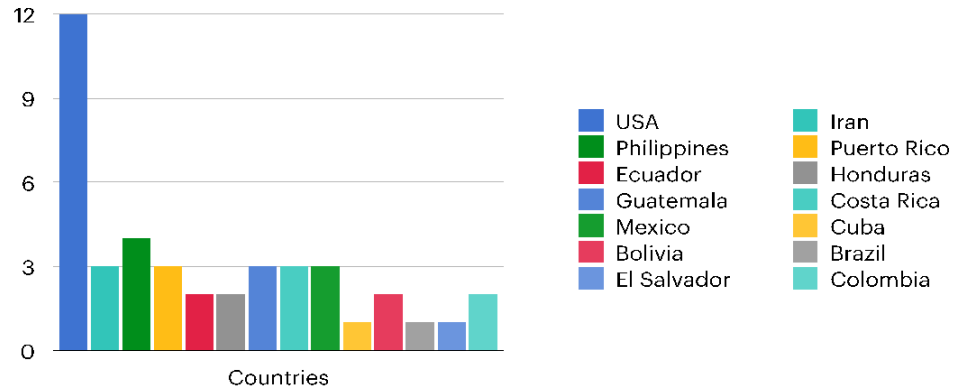


Figure 4.2

Finally, I interviewed six external experts in cross-cultural and interpreted preaching who agreed to be mentioned by name in this research. They were: Dr. Johnny Ramirez-Johnson (PhD), professor of Anthropology at Fuller Theological Seminary and a bilingual preacher for over three decades; Dr. Jonathan Downie (PhD) from Edinburgh, Scotland, an expert in interpreted preaching, bilingual preacher, conference interpreter, and church interpreting consultant; Dr. Teresa Parish (PhD), a cross-cultural missionary from Australia and the Associate Pastor of Bridge Church in San Francisco. She concentrated her PhD research on Interpreted Preaching; Dr. Rice Broocks (D.Miss), the co-founder of Every Nation Ministries, the Bishop of Bethel World Outreach Church, in Nashville TN, conference speaker on campuses around the world on the topic of apologetics, and accomplished author; Rev. Dr. Gabriel Salguero (D.Div), President and founder of the National Latino Evangelical Coalition, Senior Pastor of the Gathering Place Assemblies of God, and a fully bilingual church in Orlando, Florida; and finally,

Pastor Phillip Steele, served as a missionary in Costa Rica for twelve years, pastored a Latino congregation in Nashville, and currently serves as the regional director for Latin America of Every Nation Ministries.

### **Research Question #1**

**In the opinion of pastors and leaders at La Casa Church, what are the characteristic components of the bilingual preaching practiced at its worship services?**

To answer this research question, I presented an online questionnaire to the pastors and leaders of La Casa Church. The questionnaire contains ten questions (categorized as MTQ #1-10) which measured the understanding and ranking level of the different components of bilingual preaching found in the literature. MTQ #1 provided the respondents with the opportunity to rank in order of relevance to them the seven most common components of bilingual preaching, while MTQ #'s 2, 3, 5, and 7-9 inquired their opinion of each component. MTQ #10 explored their perception of the role of bilingual preaching in the mission of God as expressed in Revelation 7.9-12. After examining the data proceeding from the questionnaire, I compared it with the opinion of the external experts interviewed.

When ranking the seven components of bilingual preaching in order of relevance, the participants answered in a variety of ways as shown below (see figure 4.2). A fully bilingual interpreter (C1) ranked higher than all other components. The other components in order are a culturally attuned preacher (C2), a fluid preacher/interpreter interaction (C3), signs of the Holy Spirit's presence (C4), an appropriately chosen text (C5), and of



noticeably lesser relevance was the component of listeners who value bilingual contexts (C6) and a balanced time/content approach (C7).

Although Figure 4.3 shows how C1 ranked higher than the other components, it also shows how C2, C3, and C4 are of almost equal relevance for the respondents. C3 includes the interpreter as well as the preacher as it measures the relevance of the interaction between preacher and interpreter in the pulpit. A similar observation could be made of the preacher that ranks high in the order of relevance being present in both C2 and C3. Another observation is the signs of the Holy Spirit's presence (C4) and the appropriately chosen text (C5) ranked on the relevance scale. Noticeably, most respondents ranked the listeners component (C6) and the time component (C7) at the bottom of their relevance scale.

### COMPONENTS OF BILINGUAL PREACHING

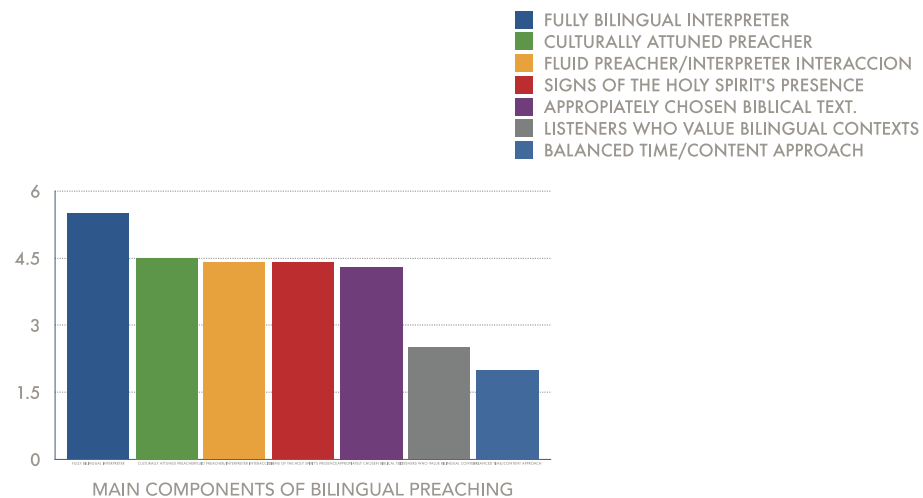


Figure 4.3

This research recognizes the relevance of the presence of the Holy Spirit and an appropriately chosen biblical text for bilingual preaching. The research also recognizes these components to be of equally great relevance in monolingual preaching. Since the aim of the study is to examine the effectiveness level of bilingual preaching, the remainder of research question #1 focused on the other five components as follows: fully bilingual interpreter, culturally attuned preacher, fluid preacher interpreter interaction, listeners who value bilingual contexts, and balanced time/content approach.

### **The Interpreter**

A majority of the respondents to MTQ #2 placed a high value on the role of the interpreter in bilingual preaching (see figure 4.3). Out of twenty-one valid responses, thirteen considered the interpreter at La Casa to be a co-preacher of the sermon. Seven people considered him an active partner who works with the primary preacher to deliver the sermon while only one person considered the interpreter to be a helper of the preacher. No one considered the interpreter to be merely someone who translates whatever the preacher says into another language. This same question of the role of the interpreter was asked in the focus groups. Each group had a similar response to the majority opinion of the online questionnaire.

For instance, FGE participant #4 asserted that the chemistry between preacher and interpreter was crucial for his understanding of the sermon. He then explained when the preacher and interpreter are on the same page and both have an equal understanding of the message, their delivery of the sermon is seamless and effective. FGS participant #6 explained when the preacher and interpreter match their tone of voice, energy, movement and even gestures, it makes the sermon clearer and the bilingual experience enjoyable.

FGB participant #3 stressed the difficulty for the interpreter to mimic everything the preacher does which makes their role very relevant in the bilingual sermon delivery.

### PERCEPTION OF THE ROLE OF THE INTERPRETER

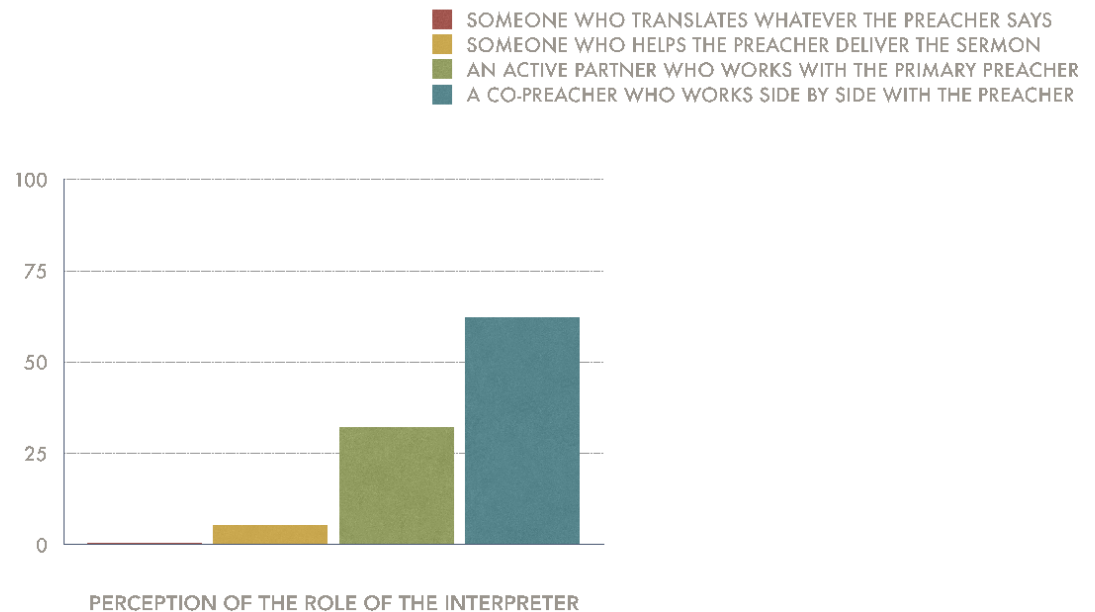


Figure 4.4

### The Preacher

The data regarding the culturally attuned preacher was collected mainly from the external expert interviews. All six experts agreed on the relevant role of the preacher. While examining the data, the following themes regarding the preacher emerged. The first theme was flexibility. Four out of six experts stressed the importance of the preacher's flexibility to work with an interpreter and adapt to the situation at hand. The second theme was vulnerability. Three experts shared how bilingual preaching allows

preachers to embrace their vulnerability. The effectiveness of the sermon depends in part on their ability to overcome mistakes and continue preaching. The third theme, related to the second, was humility. The preacher needs humility to recognize she will not be able to get her point through without the interpreter. Preachers in a bilingual setting quickly learn how much they depend on the interpreter. The fourth theme was performativity. Jonathan Downie explained how bilingual preaching forces preachers to realize a constant triadic exchange exists between the interpreter, the audience, and themselves. The preacher must understand that if the person beside him or her does not understand what is being said, the people in front will not understand it either.

A fifth recurring theme was rhythm. Four experts highlighted the relevance of a good rhythm between preacher and interpreter which usually depends more on the preacher. A sixth theme was cultural intelligence. Gabriel Salguero expressed the importance of the preacher being able to exegete the cultural diversity of their audience and adapt their delivery accordingly. All the other experts shared similar opinions on the importance of exegeting the cultures in the audience which is an unavoidable dynamic in bilingual preaching. The seventh theme was collaboration. Teresa Parish explained how bilingual preaching is at its core a collaborative effort, or more like a true partnership between preacher and interpreter. She then coined the term co-preaching to make her opinion clearer. Three other experts agreed on the term co-preaching but argued that it only happens when there is an off-pulpit relationship between preacher and interpreter (such as husband and wife or long-term friends).

### **Preacher/Interpreter Interaction**

The third highest ranked component in the MTQ was the preacher/interpreter interaction. Twenty valid responses were collected in order to address the questions “What is most helpful and what is least helpful to keep the listeners attention in these interactions?” Five recurring techniques were mentioned as most helpful to keep listeners’ attention. The first theme was humor especially when both preacher and co-preacher are confident enough they can crack jokes both with each other and with the audience. A second theme was personal stories and testimonies. Though the first two techniques are true of monolingual preaching as well, bilingual preachers at times shorten them to make up for the translation time. A third recurring theme was language switching. This happens when the preacher and interpreter switch languages between English and Spanish seamlessly during the same sermon. This value both languages equally and allows each listener to receive the sermon “first” at some point. For example, imagine always hearing others laugh first before you get to hear the joke. A fourth theme was the matching level of enthusiasm, tone, and movement of preacher and interpreter. Any large mismatch can be discerned by the listeners and becomes a distraction or even a hindrance to the meaning. The fifth theme was cultural intelligence. Preacher and interpreter are aware they are speaking to a multicultural audience and highlight it in several ways during the sermon.

Only three out of twenty participants shared their opinions related to the question of what was less important in keeping their attention. For one, the pace of translation was too fast for them to catch up. A second opinion highlighted how the dynamics of an interpreter who is not a trained preacher was less engaging, however, still understandable.

A third opinion came from one participant who explained how the language switching in the same sermon between preacher and interpreter is sometimes confusing.

On this same topic, the interaction in the three focus groups yielded similar responses to the ones from the online questionnaire. Noticeably, the participants of the bilingual focus group had more to say about the interaction of preacher and interpreter on stage than any other group. First, FGB #4 noted how the preacher and interpreter recognize what they are doing is out of the ordinary which makes them feel more human and more relatable to the listeners. Second, FGB #1 expressed how humor captures the listener's attention as it reflects the level of trust and comfort the preacher and interpreter have in sharing the pulpit. All of the other participants in this focus group agreed and encouraged this practice to continue. Third, FGB #5 explained how the personal stories of the relationship between preacher and interpreter keep her attention which coincides with several responses in the online questionnaire. Fourth, participant #2 explained how she notices the difference when the preacher and interpreter are familiar with each other. All the participants attributed this fluid interaction to the familial relationship between preacher and co-preacher at La Casa. They highlighted how with other preachers/interpreters from La Casa's pastoral team the feeling is similar, but when there is a guest speaker, less humor and less fluidity occur in the preacher/interpreter interaction. Finally, all the participants agreed they notice when the lead pastors are preaching together. The listeners feel they have prepared the sermon together and are both aware of the direction where it is headed.

The participants of the English focus group FGE shared two important insights on the matter. The first insight they all seemed to agree on was how the humor and jokes

between preacher and interpreter are the most relevant component of a captivating interaction. Second, FGE #4 highlighted the interpreter's willingness to ask the preacher for clarification to ensure she is translating the heart of the content being communicated. Participant #2 agreed and added how this interaction makes him feel comfortable knowing he can try to speak to someone from another language and he will not be judged for making a mistake.

The participants of the Spanish focus group FGS agreed they all feel great about the interaction between preacher and interpreter. To them, it feels natural and fluid, as if they have prepared the sermon together. They all stressed how language switching is very helpful, and they usually do not realize when the preacher and interpreter switch languages.

### **The Listeners**

The literature reviewed repeatedly referenced the listeners as an integral part of the preaching event since the sermon is not preached in a vacuum but to an actual congregation with human beings who have emotions, intellect, and volition. Therefore, MTQ #3 aimed at measuring the focus and distraction factor of the listeners. As shown in figure 4.5 below, four categories of listeners were found at La Casa. The first category included those listeners who focus on their own language while trying to understand the other language (55 percent). The second category was made of those listeners who focus only on their own language and ignore the other language (25 percent). The third category were the listeners who battle distraction from the alternation between languages (10 percent). The final category was made of those who try to listen to their primary language and understand the other at the same time while battling constant distraction (10

percent). In summary, 80 percent of the participants affirmed they are able to be focused while 20 percent expressed they battle distraction caused by the alternation of languages. Noteworthy, none of those who focused on their primary language only expressed battling any distraction.

### WAYS OF LISTENING TO BILINGUAL PREACHING

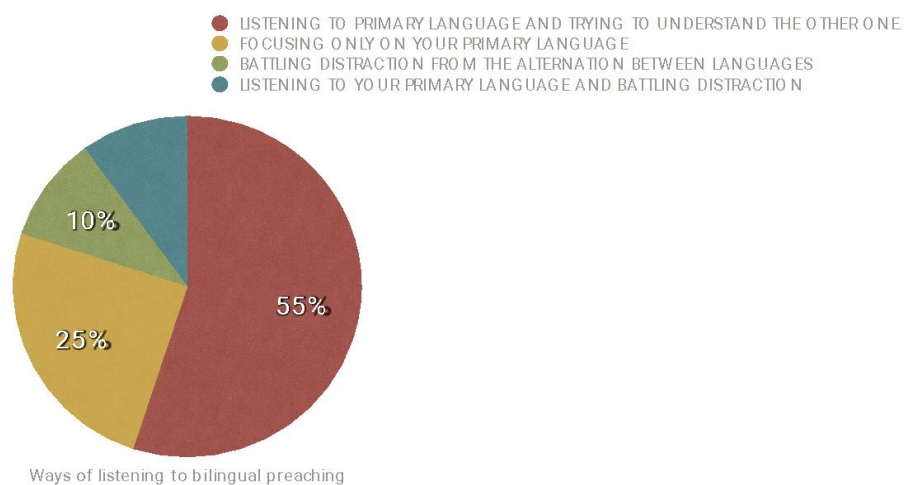


Figure 4.5

Another relevant aspect to discern about the listeners was their feelings toward bilingual preaching. MTQ #7 explored the participants' opinions on the matter. Twenty valid responses were collected to the question, "What do you typically think and/or feel when the preacher or the interpreter is speaking in a language you do not understand?". After analyzing the data, a few common threads surfaced. First, bilingual participants affirmed they do not think or feel anything special. They simply understand the message in both languages. Second, Spanish speaking participants mentioned they feel the preaching is very fluid and they do not notice the difference. One participant highlighted



how she focuses on Spanish and tries to understand the translation to English. Third, English speaking participants observed it was hard at first but they got used to it. Currently they feel more engaged trying to understand what is being said in Spanish, too. Fourth, the intercalation between preacher and interpreter gives the monolingual listeners time to digest the message better. Two personal opinions stood out. One participant affirmed how bilingual preaching has brought him joy to see what a multicultural church vision can do. Another participant observed how the speed of interpretation impacts her feeling of being edified or not by the sermon.

### **Time**

The last component examined was time. To measure the feeling of participants regarding time, MTQ #5 asked how they perceived the ratio between time and content of bilingual preaching at La Casa? The participants responded to this question more decisively. Nineteen out of twenty-one affirmed the length of the sermons as having an ideal blend of rich content and time efficiency. Two participants described the bilingual sermon as typically longer than a monolingual sermon since it attempts to deliver the same content in two languages. No participant reported that content was being sacrificed for the sake of time (see figure 4.5). As a follow up, question #9 quizzed them on their perception of the length of an average sermon at La Casa. Twenty participants answered with a variety of length estimates. The lowest estimate was twenty-five minutes (one participant) and the highest was sixty minutes (two participants). The majority of participants chose between thirty and forty-five minutes of length. After analyzing all the answers, the average perceived length of a sermon at La Casa was thirty-eight minutes

while the actual average length of a sermon for the six months prior to the study was forty-two minutes.

### PERCEPTION OF CONTENT/TIME BALANCE

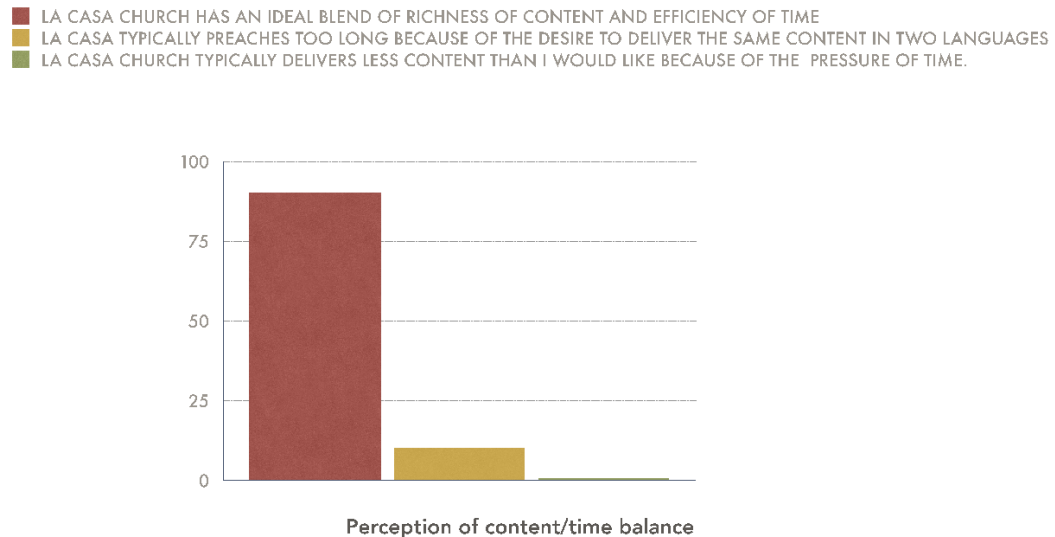


Figure 4.6

On the issue of time, the external expert interviews added two important perspectives. Four out of six experts agree the rhythm between preacher and interpreter has an immediate impact on the sensation of time. A good rhythm with a clear flow in the intercalation between preacher and interpreter helps the audience to be drawn into the sermon and lose track of time. Johnny Ramirez-Johnson used the term coordination instead of rhythm. He affirmed the coordination between preacher and interpreter has a direct impact on the sensation of time and length. This seems to indicate that tempo might be even more important than the total sermon time. For instance, the listeners might be

able to handle a fifty minutes sermon with great tempo better than a thirty minutes sermon with slow tempo.

### **Research Question #2**

**In the opinion of key leaders and congregants at La Casa Church, what are the main benefits and challenges of bilingual preaching?**

To answer this question, I collected qualitative data from the three focus groups conducted with leaders and congregants at La Casa Church. The answers from the English focus group (FGE), the Spanish focus group (FGS), and the bilingual focus group (FGB) were analyzed to observe similarities and contrasts. Then these results were compared with the answers of MTQ #6 and analyzed in light of answers #3 and #4 of the external expert interviews.

#### **Benefits of Bilingual Preaching**

After analyzing the data from all three focus groups and the ministry team questionnaire, three main categories emerged: personal, missional, and cultural benefits. The most relevant observation of these categories is how the personal benefits outweighed both the missional and the cultural benefits identified by the focus group participants and the ministry team participants. Alternatively, the external expert interviews mainly reported missional benefits, few cultural benefits, and very few personal benefits.

**Personal Benefits.** The FGB participants agreed on five personal benefits related to their reality as bilingual individuals themselves. First, hearing the sermon in two languages clarifies the concepts better. Second, it increases the sermon's level of impact since each language has its own impact. Third, it allows them to keep connected to their

Latino roots while living in The United States. Fourth, it brings a sense of enjoyment and familiarity, a feeling of being at home. Fifth, it allows them to invite all their friends as they have both monolingual and bilingual friends.

The FGE participants also shared five personal benefits with mixed input between native English individuals and individuals whose first language is not English or Spanish. First, bilingual preaching allows for friendships and relationships to form among people unlikely to connect otherwise. Second, it allows for husbands and wives who are from different language backgrounds to enjoy the sermon together. Third, it provides an opportunity for Anglo children from a young age to make friends with children from other nations in a safe and relatable environment. Fourth, the pause for translation between languages allows the listeners to digest and comprehend the sermon better. Fifth, it provides a feeling of safety and familiarity for those who speak English with an accent. This may have been valued because of a missional concern but was stated in terms of personal benefit to diverse persons.

The FGS participants mentioned only personal benefits to their experience of bilingual preaching. The first benefit they observed is how parents and children can receive the same message and worship together. A second benefit is the opportunity to connect between Latinos and Anglos in a safe environment. A third benefit is it helps them to learn and practice English among friends. The fourth benefit is that it develops a sense of comfort and familiarity with non-Latinos. The fifth benefit is that it gives them a sense of joy as they find themselves part of a unique church experience.

The participants of the ministry team questionnaire reported similar personal benefits of bilingual preaching. Out of fifteen benefits collected seven were personal. Of

these, only two were not mentioned in the focus groups discussions. First, it expands the biblical vocabulary of the bilingual listeners who can compare the same teaching in two languages. Secondly, it increases engagement as it facilitates a more active participation in the experience regardless of which language the listener knows and is focusing upon.

**Missional Benefits.** Interestingly, the focus groups reported very few missional benefits while the ministry team questionnaire reported more. The primary missional benefit the FGB participants reported was what they perceived as the cohesive unity of people from different cultures worshiping together in the same room. Though not emphasized in the discussion, they did also register the benefit of being able to invite both monolingual and bilingual friends. The FGE participants agreed on two missional benefits. The first missional benefit was bilingual preaching allows for a broader understanding of context, cultures, and different perspectives. Secondly, bilingual preaching bridges the gap between cultures and people groups in a practical way. Noticeably, the FGS participants did not mention any missional benefits at all.

**Cultural Benefits.** This category highlights the benefits of bilingual preaching as seen through the lenses of current cultural trends in North America. In this particular category, the focus groups reported two benefits. The FGB participants expressed the benefit of witnessing how different people groups enjoy a meal together during the bilingual sermon while the FGE participants reiterated the sense of inclusivity and acceptance. Basically, the bilingual church's message is come as you are no matter what language or culture you are from, there is room for you. Noteworthy, the Spanish focus group did not mention any cultural benefits. All their participation was focused on the personal benefits they perceive for themselves and their families while the ministry team

questionnaire expressed four additional cultural benefits. First, bilingual preaching enriches all with cultural diversity. Secondly, it highlights the equality of both cultures by featuring their languages side by side on stage. Thirdly, it creates an inclusive diverse community welcoming to anyone who speaks English, Spanish, or both. Finally, it pushes back against racism and displays God's heart for all nations.

**Expert Interviews Comparison.** In comparison to the data collected from the congregants and leaders at La Casa, the external experts interviewed shared multiple missional benefits, a few cultural ones, and very few personal benefits. Aside from the benefits already found in the focus groups and questionnaire responses, the external experts added the following missional benefits to bilingual preaching:

1. Reaches the growing number of Latino immigrants.
2. Develops a bigger mindset of church leadership.
3. Demonstrates Revelation 7.9-12 in a practical way.
4. Raises up leaders to minister in their own language.
5. Trains missionaries for the mission field in North America and the nations.
6. Builds a bridge to further ministry among different ethnic groups.
7. Helps develop a great passion for reaching the nations for Christ.
8. Increases church health because it carries a more biblical DNA.
9. Increases church sustainability and longevity since the church is not reaching only one culture that could be extinguished in the future from a particular geographical area.
10. Deepens and enriches cultural hermeneutics and homiletics in proclamation.
11. Incarnates a global ecclesiology.

12. Promotes a ministry of cultural reconciliation as presented in Ephesians 2.13-14.

The cultural benefits mentioned in the expert interviews that were not present in the focus groups or the ministry team responses included social integration, breaking down power dynamics, and English colonialism. Consistent with the focus group responses, the experts interviewed mentioned the importance of the church going out of its way to make room for those who do not speak the predominant language. As to personal benefits, the experts expressed agreement with the focus groups on the benefits of learning another language and the ability of parents and children to join together in worship in their language of preference. An additional personal benefit was that it promoted patience in the listeners which is a fruit of the Spirit. To summarize, the local participants highlighted more experiential personal benefits that helped them feel comfortable enough to call this their home church. However, the external experts focused on personal benefits that were more transformative. In other words, the experts revealed how bilingual preaching changes people while the listeners revealed how it keeps people.

### **Challenges of Bilingual Preaching**

After analyzing the data collected from the three focus groups and the online questionnaire as well as the expert interviews, three categories emerged: personal, missional, and logistical challenges. Similar to the benefits, more personal than missional or logistical challenges were reported by the leaders and congregants of La Casa while the expert interviews rendered more logistical challenges than missional and personal ones. In general, less challenges existed than benefits reported by the focus groups and the online questionnaire. The external experts showcased more challenges than the ones mentioned by La Casa participants. Nevertheless, all participants affirmed the benefits of

bilingual preaching far outweigh the challenges for the purposes of a multicultural church in North America.

**Personal Challenges.** A general theme that emerged from all three focus groups is distraction as the main personal challenge. The participants explained how, at first, the back and forth between two languages was distracting and it was easy to lose focus. Even the bilingual participants felt distracted when they started attending La Casa services. Yet, all participants agreed after a few weeks their ears were trained and more comfortable in the bilingual environment. All FGS participants mentioned distraction as the only challenge they felt at the beginning. Eventually, they got used to it and stopped noticing the language exchange. The participants' interaction in both FGB and FGE highlighted that they believe those who do not like bilingualism or cannot see its relevance for the vision of the church simply leave. Those who stay usually do so for the vision first, then they get to enjoy all its benefits.

Another personal challenge highlighted by the participants of FGB and FGE is the challenge of worshiping in two languages although this challenge is not directly related to the purpose statement of this research which examines the effectiveness level of bilingual preaching. The association between bilingual worship and bilingual preaching was very clear in the interaction of two out of three focus groups, corroborated by the answers of five out of twenty participants of the online questionnaire and highlighted by the opinion of four out of the six external experts interviewed. When sharing about bilingual worship, the participants from La Casa emphasized it was difficult at first to get used to singing in two languages intercalated while the external experts highlighted the importance of



bilingual worship even considering the cost of the workload it demands on the church leadership team.

**Missional Challenges.** The participants of all focus groups presented only one missional challenge to bilingual preaching. Since bilingual preaching attracts people who speak at least two different languages, forming an authentic community with everyone is difficult. One may be in the same worship room, but actual communication and interaction is scarce across language barriers. Eventually friendships will form and deepen within the same language group, but efforts to relate to people from the other language group would necessitate learning the other group's language and/or vice-versa.

The online questionnaire responses registered three more missional challenges in the opinion of La Casa leaders and pastors. First, bilingual preaching attracts a smaller potential audience by default resulting in slower growth than monolingual churches. Secondly, bilingualism can be a cringe factor for monolingual first-time guests. Thirdly, this methodology is difficult to replicate as it depends on developing great interpreters, and preachers willing to work very closely with an interpreter/co-preacher.

**Logistical Challenges.** All participants in this study (internal and external) noted bilingual preaching demands more logistical efforts than monolingual preaching. The FGB participants mentioned how jokes do not translate well from one language to another. It takes great effort from the interpreter to find an equivalency. Forethought is needed from the preacher to find more easily translatable jokes. The FGE participants highlighted how bilingual preaching takes more time than monolingual which is a cultural cringe factor for North American listeners specifically. A second logistical challenge mentioned by FGE participants was when the preacher is not used to working

with an interpreter and constantly speaks over the interpreter. All the participants of this particular focus group noticed a big difference in the delivery of the sermon at La Casa when there is a guest speaker in comparison to the local pastors who are bilingual and used to preaching with an interpreter.

The online questionnaire responses noted how challenging finding and training interpreters for bilingual preaching is. These participants did not mention anything about the ability of the preacher to adapt to bilingual preaching while the bilingual focus group participants insisted the preacher must be trained as well for this preaching methodology. However, one participant in the online questionnaire argued that the preacher must prepare a rich content to keep the audience engaged during the sermon delivery.

**Expert Interviews Comparison.** While the focus groups and questionnaire expressed the challenges of bilingual preaching, mainly from the perspective of the listeners, the expert interviews showcased the challenges from the perspective of church leadership. The main logistical challenge surfacing from all six interviews is the quality of interpretation. All experts agreed that it is hard to find and properly train interpreters for bilingual preaching. A second logistical challenge emerging from the interviews is the preacher's ability and willingness to adapt to bilingual preaching. For instance, bilingual preaching requires the preacher to be more aware of accent, mannerisms, jokes, and even cultural nuances. It also limits certain preaching styles and tools as they do not translate well. Wordplay, acrostics, and other preaching tools which work well in one language hardly ever work in two languages.

A third logistical challenge mentioned by five out of six experts interviewed is the huge investment of time and effort to train the entire leadership team for bilingual

ministry. Bilingual preaching requires the preparation of not only a bilingual worship team but also a bilingual prayer team, bilingual greeter team, and a bilingual liturgy overall. Every aspect of church communication and ministry must be mindful of the bilingual reality.

As far as missional challenges, two main challenges surfaced from the opinion of the expert interviews. First, bilingual ministry is messy, just like the situation described in Acts 6 with the Hebrews and the Hellenists. When a church chooses bilingual preaching, it exposes itself to messiness as it highlights the cultural differences in the congregation. Secondly, bilingual ministry is sacrificial. All parties involved need to sacrifice something in order to be part of a bilingual church. The preacher must act in humility to rely on the interpreter. The interpreter must follow the preacher's lead. The listeners sacrifice their own culture and language to make room for the others. The leaders must be mindful of differences in the congregation from the pulpit to the pews.

Finally, the interviews conveyed one personal challenge for bilingual preaching. In the opinion of the experts, the main personal challenge to bilingual preaching in North America is Western comfort. North Americans in general are used to going on mission trips where they speak with an interpreter to the locals, but when it happens in their own land, it feels uncomfortable. The Anglo audience of bilingual preaching must be willing to be uncomfortable for the sake of others.

### **Research Question #3**

**What methods, practices, or ways of being would increase the effectiveness level of bilingual preaching at a multicultural church in North America?**

To answer this question, I relied mainly on the opinion of the external expert interviews which provided a variety of extensive responses to the issue. After analyzing the data collected from the expert interviews, I compared and contrasted their answers with the responses of La Casa leaders to MTQ #8 and FG questions #5 and #6. This triangulation of data revealed some important recurring themes.

### **Ways of Being**

Four out of six experts viewed ways of being as the foundation for the whole practice. Few recurring themes emerged from their answers. The first and most agreed upon way of being is flexibility. For bilingual preaching to be more effective and become more of a widespread practice all parties involved need to exercise great flexibility. The preacher, the interpreter, the listeners, and the church leadership team must realize their church service will never be exactly like each individual desires it to be. In fact, everyone is sacrificing something in order to worship together with people from other cultures and languages.

A close second to flexibility is humility. Preachers and interpreters must walk in humility realizing they depend on each other for the effective delivery of the sermon. They also realize, no matter how experienced they become, they cannot possibly understand all the nuances of every culture in the congregation. Therefore, to increase their effectiveness level, preachers and interpreters need to develop a relationship with their listeners and learn from them about their specific cultural contexts.

A third way of being is authenticity. The preacher and the interpreter need to minister from the comfort of their authenticity, recognizing their own cultural and linguistic limitations. A fourth way is partnership. Bilingual preaching is a collaborative

effort between preacher and interpreter. From the preparation stage to the delivery stage, the preacher invites the interpreter to work together on a co-mission to preach the word to their multilingual audience. A fifth way is cultural intelligence. Preachers, interpreters and church leaders should live with a deep sense of respect for other cultures which would enable them to maintain a posture of a learner or a student of culture. Sixth is commitment. The effectiveness level of bilingual preaching increases greatly by a leadership commitment to continue and improve the practice constantly. Preachers and interpreters who commit to this preaching methodology understand it takes time, practice, and constant reflection to improve their sermons week after week. They also commit to developing new bilingual preaching teams and sharing their experience to increase awareness that bilingual preaching is biblical, possible, and effective when done right. The seventh and final way of being is tension. The multicultural, multilingual environment of bilingual preaching will always produce tension, conflict, and discomfort. An effective leadership team learns to embrace the tension and address conflicts like the early church did in Acts 6.1-7.

## **Methods**

As expected from experts in cross-cultural preaching, the interviewees shared a number of practical methods. In most responses, methods and practices seemed to be mixed together. Yet, after analyzing all the data together, several clear themes emerged to fit in the category of methods. The first method identified was co-preaching. Four out of six experts presented this method as the most effective expression of bilingual preaching. The preacher and the interpreter work together on all stages of the sermon with the caution that this method works best when the preacher and interpreter have an off-stage

relationship of mutual respect and collaboration. Noticeably, one bilingual expert considered language shifting by one preacher alone to be more effective than a preacher and interpreter sharing the pulpit.

A second method repeated in four of the six interviews was reflection. Preacher and interpreter need to meet after each sermon and reflect on what went well, what went wrong, and what can be improved. Creating open feedback mechanisms where people from the congregation can freely share their perception of the sermon would help to increase the effectiveness of this method. Noteworthy, this reflective method was emphasized by the four bilingual experts and was not even mentioned by the monolingual experts. The third method was constant communication between preacher and interpreter so they can sync heart, body language, tone, and gestures. Even when the interpreter is viewed only as a translation channel and not necessarily a co-preacher, the familiarity of preacher-interpreter prior to the sermon delivery increases its effectiveness level.

A fourth method shared by three experts is to add translation for other languages present in the congregation. Bilingual preaching gives a great opportunity for including more translators to other languages by using audio technology (booth, microphone, and earphones). Finally, equip both preacher and interpreter equally for the task of bilingual preaching. Five out of six experts highlighted the need of training the preacher as much as the interpreter for this preaching methodology to be effective. The preacher needs to be trained on the mechanics of speaking with interpretation in order to develop an inner respect for the work of the interpreter while the interpreter needs to be trained in the skill of interpretation in order to develop such a heart for the congregation to do whatever it takes to get the message delivered to the listeners in the most culturally relevant way.

One expert suggested the idea of preaching the sermon in one language from the pulpit and have it translated in writing into the other language to be handed to the listeners and rotate the pulpit language each Sunday.

### **Practices**

From the many practices suggested by the experts to increase the effectiveness and the likelihood of a church offering bilingual preaching, a few emerged across all interviews. The first and most agreed upon practice is prayer. Five out of six experts explained the relevance of a commitment to prayer for bilingual preaching to be effective. Jonathan Downie used the term Spirit-filled interpreting. He further explained how bilingual preaching is a spiritual endeavor. Therefore, the interpreter needs to invite God into the process. After all, Jesus promised his disciples that in moments of pressure, the Holy Spirit will guide them what to say (Luke 12.12). The pressure of being in front of an expectant congregation demands the interpreter to rely on the Holy Spirit for the most adequate interpretation. Four other experts explained the importance of praying and asking God to guide both preacher and interpreter as much as opening the spiritual ears of the listeners to receive the message.

A second recommended practice is to develop a list of practical steps for interpreters to grow in their skills. Steps like phonetic exercises, brain training to avoid fixating on exact word equivalency, to accept and overcome their own mistakes graciously, and even to develop a peer support group where interpreters can share their experiences and learn from each other. A third practice is to include more bilingual leaders in every aspect of church leadership. This practice enables the church leaders to serve better all congregants regardless of which language they speak. The greeters,

hospitality, children ministry, and worship team all need to have some bilingual leaders to be able to interact with people from each language.

A fourth practice reiterated in the interviews is to make people aware of what they are being asked to commit to from the onset. Bilingual preaching is a big commitment, and the leadership team needs to constantly clarify the vision, highlight the benefits, and invite people to partake of this multicultural experience knowing the cost of discomfort triggered by constantly listening to the sermon in two languages. A fifth practice is to constantly disciple the congregation in ecclesiology. Bilingual preaching is a historic church practice dating back to the book of Acts. Nevertheless, the church in the global north for the last hundred years have focused more on the individual expression of faith than the communal aspect of worship. Believers in North America are used to attending churches where they feel comfortable in every way. In order to sacrifice comfort for the benefit of community and togetherness, the believers need to be disciplined on what the church is called to be from a biblical and theological perspective.

A sixth recommended practice by five of the interviewed experts is to make room for new preachers and interpreters to practice bilingual speaking in different parts of the liturgy, then meet with them to evaluate and reflect on needed improvements.

Incrementally, continue to empower these preachers and interpreters till they feel comfortable to preach a full sermon. The key for this practice would be to have either an established preacher with a beginner interpreter or vice versa. A seventh practice highlighted by three experts is to develop the habit of reading and exegeting the word in both languages. The bilingual preacher and interpreter will find this practice enriches their understanding of Scriptures as well as enhancing their biblical vocabulary.



### **Comparison with La Casa's Leaders' Opinions**

Among the ministry team responses to MTQ #8, the most highlighted and celebrated method was the language switching between preacher and interpreter. Twelve out of twenty-one participants found this practice very effective in capturing and maintaining the audience's attention. This observation by La Casa's leaders seems to go along the same line with the co-preaching method which turned out to be the most recommended method by the external experts. A second method emerging from the ministry team responses is the dynamic communication between preacher and interpreter to the point that their tone, voice, body language, and even hand gestures are synced. This observation is very similar to the third method recommended by the experts. One persistent observation in the MTQ #8 responses is that La Casa leaders found humor to be an impactful method to gain and retain their attention. However, humor is not mentioned at all in any of the expert interviews.

Similarly, the responses of the three focus groups highlighted how the dynamic interaction between preacher and interpreter (including humor) was the most effective method for capturing and maintaining their attention. All participants of the focus groups agreed on the language switching between preacher and interpreter in the same sermon to be very engaging and they encouraged its continuity.

### **Missiological Role**

The last question of the ministry team questionnaire aimed to discover if La Casa's pastors and leaders believes a connection exists between bilingual preaching and the mission of God to redeem people from every nation, tribe, and language as described in Revelation 7.9-12. Noticeably, this question had more robust comments from all

twenty valid responses collected. After analyzing all responses, several themes emerged. The first theme was that of the cultures/nations. Sixty percent of participants expressed that bilingual preaching allows for a more robust multicultural community to form as it brings different nations together in a genuine way which is a big part of the mission of God. Bilingual preaching gives a safe space for people from different nations to learn to live together, worship together, and form connections which otherwise would not happen. A second theme was heaven/eternity. Forty percent of participants highlighted how bilingual preaching brings them a sense of heaven, eternity, and the kingdom of God. Because bilingual preaching makes room for people from different cultures and languages, it allows them to think and imagine the moment when all believers will be united in front of the throne of Jesus.

A third theme was togetherness/community. Forty percent of participants expressed how bilingual preaching allows for people to form genuine relationships with others whom they would not normally connect with in other environments. One participant expressed how bilingual preaching embraces diversity and rejects any sense of exclusivity.

A final theme was God himself. Surprisingly, 35 percent of participants pointed to the diversity of cultures at La Casa worshiping together as an indication of the only one true God. Seeing people from different cultures and different languages worship together sparked in them a sense of awe at the one God who brings them together and makes every effort to welcome all who believe in him at the same table.

### **Effectiveness Categories**

As described in Chapter Three, after three years of planting La Casa Church, I wanted to examine the centrality of bilingual preaching to the vision of the church. I also wanted to discern the best practices which could make bilingual preaching more effective. In order to achieve these two goals, I designed an effectiveness scale of five categories. The first four categories of the scale were designed to clarify how central bilingual preaching is to pursuing the vision of La Casa while the fifth category was designed to discern the best practices which could make bilingual preaching more effective in North America. MTQ #4 asked the participants to choose the statements they consider to be true about bilingual preaching. The data shown in figure 4.7 below rendered the following results. First, the data confirmed the assumption that bilingual preaching is viable in a multicultural church in North America with fifteen out of twenty-one participants choosing the statement as true. This data is corroborated by the answers of all focus group participants and all external experts interviewed.

Secondly, bilingual preaching is suitable for the specific context of La Casa. Although this statement garnished only eight out of twenty-one responses to MTQ #4, it was widely established by the participants of the three focus groups. While the reasons were different for each group, all participants of FGE, FGS, and FGB found bilingual preaching to be suitable for their specific context. Thirdly, bilingual preaching is central to pursuing the vision of La Casa. Twelve out of twenty-one responses to MTQ #4 affirmed this to be true. Additionally, the participants of the three focus groups explained how bilingual preaching is at the heart of the vision of La Casa. The FGB participants particularly explained how bilingual preaching makes them feel at home and distinguishes La Casa from any other church they have visited in North America. The

FGS participants shared they felt attracted to the multicultural vision, but most importantly they enjoy the benefit of worshipping with their children in two different languages while the FGE participants reiterated that the benefits of multiculturalism and inclusivity far outweigh the challenges of listening to the sermon in two languages.

The fourth category was desirability. Bilingual preaching ranked desirable to only six out of twenty-one participants of the online questionnaire with three participants describing it to be sometimes necessary but not ideal. In addition, the FGE participants stated that overcoming the distraction of two languages in order to focus on the sermon took them a few weeks. Similarly, the FGS participants agreed bilingual preaching was distracting at first, but the benefits were much greater than the challenges. Noteworthy, five out of seven participants of FGB found bilingual preaching to be desirable and to enhance their comprehension of the sermon. Finally, the experts interviewed affirmed the value and benefits of bilingual preaching, yet they all agreed no one comes to church for the interpreting, they come for the community and for what God is doing in that particular church.

### EFFECTIVENESS CATEGORIES

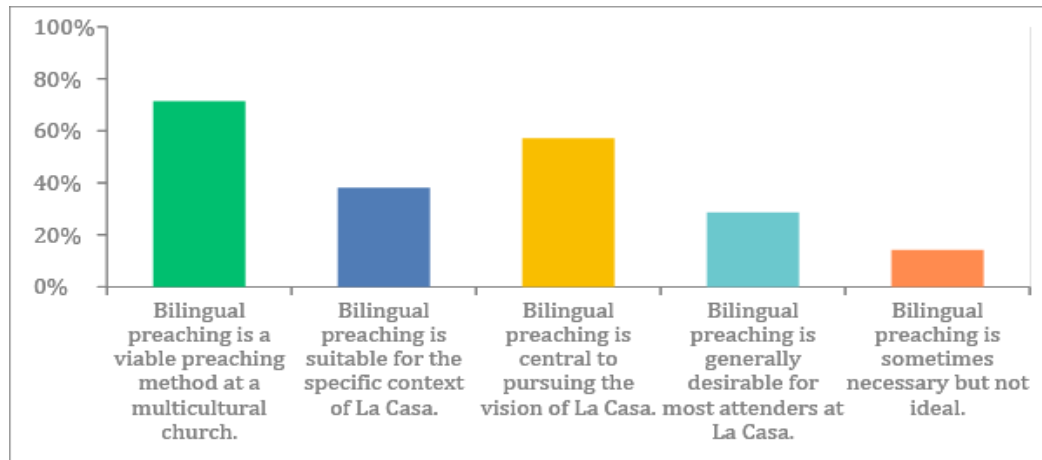


Figure 4.7

The fifth and final category was reproducibility. To furnish this category, I gathered and analyzed the data from the answers to questions #5, #6, and #10 of the expert interviews. All six experts affirmed bilingual preaching to be a reproducible model in North America with the following cautions. First, bilingual preaching should follow a theological statement of the church and not just a practical solution to a need. Churches which adopt bilingualism should think through their vision, their ecclesiological, and their missiological reasons behind adopting this methodology. Secondly, bilingual preaching should be the means to an end, not a goal in itself. The goal is to plant multicultural churches that break ethnic barriers and promote a global ecclesiology on the local level. Thirdly, bilingual preaching requires the whole church to be involved. Every aspect of the liturgy, the different ministries, the leadership team, and even the church communication and public image must reflect the multicultural, multilingual nature of said church. Fourthly, bilingual preaching requires a level of excellence in the sermon preparation and delivery by the preacher and interpreter team. Constant training, reflection, and mutual collaboration of these two are key to the success of this preaching

methodology. Several best practices recommended by the experts in response to Research Question #3 were dedicated to enhancing this particular caution. Finally, this methodology should not be limited to preacher and interpreter alternating languages from the pulpit. Other viable options should be explored and implemented as needed, such as a fully bilingual preacher shifting language in the same sermon.

### **Summary of Major Findings**

Several major findings emerged based on the data analysis. They are listed here only in summary form and will be further discussed in the next chapter:

1. Bilingual preaching is a historic church practice that continues to play an important role in the fulfillment of the mission of God.
2. Bilingual preaching reflects a global ecclesiology within a local context.
3. The benefits of bilingual preaching far outweigh its challenges.
4. Bilingual preaching is more effective when the preacher and interpreter develop an off-stage relationship with mutual respect and a thorough reflective practice.
5. Bilingual preaching is most effective when the preacher and interpreter work together as co-preachers of the sermon.
6. Bilingual preaching is central to pursuing the vision of La Casa.

## CHAPTER 5

### LEARNING REPORT FOR THE PROJECT

#### Overview of the Chapter

In the growing Latino population in Nashville, first and second generations prefer to worship in Spanish or English respectively. In response to this phenomenon, La Casa launched as a fully bilingual church in September 2019 with intercalated bilingual preaching in all of its worship services. The vision of the church is to be a community of disciples making disciples from different nations. After three years of ministry where the church grew from a handful of believers to over a hundred and fifty in regular weekly attendance, I wanted to examine the centrality of bilingual preaching to pursuing the vision of La Casa and discern the best practices for this methodology to become more reproducible in North America. That is why this research project sought to examine the effectiveness level of bilingual preaching in communicating the message of the gospel to a multicultural church in North America. I approached this task by gathering internal data from La Casa leaders and congregants to better understand their perception of bilingual preaching. Then, I interviewed external experts in cross-cultural and interpreted preaching to gather their perspective on the matter. The analysis of the internal and external data suggested the major findings which are summarized below.

#### Major Findings

##### **Major Finding #1: Bilingual Preaching is a Historic Church Practice that Plays an Important Role in the Fulfilment of the Mission of God**

I have been practicing bilingual preaching for over twenty-five years in different settings and places. Still, when we launched La Casa Church, it was the first time I

preached bilingual sermons every week to the same congregation. The vision of La Casa from the beginning was to be a multicultural church for people from different nations. Nevertheless, we did not decide on the preaching methodology until we realized that the people we were reaching spoke different languages. Bilingual preaching was an innovative response to a real need. In the time since the church launched, I continued to wonder if this preaching methodology was just a temporary answer to a current need or does it have a biblical, theological, and historical role in the fulfilment of the mission of God.

During the research phase, I designed the questionnaire, the focus groups, and the expert interviews to answer this question from the perspective of the internal and external participants. Then I observed La Casa leaders passionately relaying to us how much they valued bilingual preaching. Most of the answers were around the ideas of unity, togetherness, and community. Surprisingly, both the participants of the questionnaire and the focus groups expressed that the environment produced by bilingual preaching reminds them of God and heaven. On the other hand, the external experts shared several ways they see bilingual preaching helping the church in the pursuit of the mission of God. After a thorough observation of all the responses and consideration of my personal observations of the La Casa community for the past four years, I could not help but conclude bilingual preaching does indeed play a bigger role in the fulfilment of the mission of God. Humility, unity, inclusivity, patience, and agape love are some of the traits this preaching methodology produces in both the pulpit and the pews.

The literature reviewed for this study showcased how bilingual preaching is not a new practice. In fact, bilingual preaching has been a church practice since the book of



Acts. As one author put it, “a church that was born interpreting might live by it too” (Downie, *Towards a Homiletic* 66). Plenty of evidence exists in the book of Acts and throughout church history to affirm the historic nature of this practice (Sanneh, *Whose Religion* 97; Lampe 20-27; Wenzel 107). Sanneh even goes further by affirming the relevant role of translation in the missionary work of the church “translation is the church’s birthmark as well as its missionary benchmark” (97). Therefore, some missiologists and interpreted preaching scholars believe bilingual preaching has a bigger role beyond the communication of the sermon in the pursuit of the mission of God as it brings a greater diversity and a sense of belonging to the body of Christ (Gonzales; Ramirez-Johnson; Parish; Downie).

The biblical and theological foundations for this research suggest God created the diverse cultures and languages in the world and continues to validate them. God diversified human languages at Babel to spread humanity across the earth, giving space and time for cultures to emerge (Gen. 11.5-8). God chose an elderly barren couple to bring his blessing through them back to all nations (Gen. 12.1-3). God weaved diversity into the fabric of his entire creation from the irreducible complexity of the cell to the vastness of the universe. The same God honored diversity of cultures and languages in his incarnation as a Jewish Messiah from gentile ancestors (Matt. 1.1-17). Then this God shared his message of salvation in Aramaic, Hebrew, and Greek through the New Testament writings. At the end of the story, the Bible highlights the great assembly where people from every nation, culture, and language are worshiping together the One who sits on the throne (Rev. 7.9).

Before he ascended to heaven, Jesus commissioned his followers to go and make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28.19) which implied the need of interpretation. A quick look at the book of Acts highlights how God birthed the church to be multicultural and multilingual (Acts 2). The first conflict of the early church involved the need of translation and cultural understanding (Act 6.1-6). The first missionary church was multicultural and multilingual in nature (Acts 11-13). From there on, the mission of God grew with translation everywhere it went (Sanneh, *Whose Religion* 97).

Considering these biblical and theological foundations as well as the findings of this research, I have to conclude that bilingual preaching has an important missiological role in the big story of God. One of the most significant realizations during the research was that bilingual attendees were able to engage in mission more comprehensively as they could reach out to and invite all of their relational network, not just the portion that spoke the language of mono-lingual worship. In a practical way, bilingual preaching is a living reminder of the mission of God who spread us out from Babel, gathered us back at Pentecost, and sends us out again to bring every nation, tribe, and language back to his eternal kingdom.

### **Major Finding #2: Bilingual Preaching Reflects a Global Ecclesiology within a Local Context**

Local churches are complex organisms by nature. Any gathering of people in one community to pursue the same vision will certainly produce friction and challenges. The multicultural dimension adds an even greater layer of complexity to any local church. We envisioned La Casa as a multicultural church, gathering people from different nations who live in the greater Nashville area. Therefore, complexity was expected and evident

from day one. Nevertheless, the level of complexity produced by the number of cultures represented in the congregation was beyond my greatest expectations. Bilingual preaching attracted a wide range of cultural diversity. At the same time, bilingual preaching produced discomfort and complexity to the community being formed. With the understanding that healthy organisms grow and thrive, I needed to know if bilingual preaching was contributing to building a healthy, local church or not.

During the research phase, I collected extensive data from the ministry team questionnaire and the targeted discussion of the three focus groups. After analyzing the data thoroughly, a predominant theme emerged in regard of church health. La Casa participants perceived bilingual preaching as a major contributing factor to bringing unity within diversity. They agreed that a multicultural church is healthier than a monocultural church as it is a better reflection of the global church. Some leaders even pointed to the diversity they enjoy at La Casa as a testament to the character of God who brings all cultures together to worship him. Other participants emphasized how to them the multicultural, multilingual worship experience itself is spirit lifting and a vivid illustration of the unity of the people of God.

The external experts enhanced these theological concepts by affirming the following statements. First, bilingual preaching makes room for a more robust church diversity thereby increasing church health as it carries a more biblical DNA. Secondly, bilingual preaching contributes to church sustainability and longevity as it does not depend on one people group which could diminish or be extinguished in the future from a geographical area. Thirdly, multicultural churches by nature develop a great passion for reaching the nations for Christ. Finally, bilingual preaching reflects a global ecclesiology

within a local context. For example, bilingual preaching at La Casa attracts Anglos, Latinos, and other ethnicities. These groups are usually unaware of the realities of the church in other nations aside from their own. However, the interaction in their current local context results in enhancing their perspective of the global church.

After reviewing the results of the research, I came to the conviction that bilingual preaching positively contributes to the formation of a healthy multicultural church. All evidence points towards bilingual worship creating a slow growing church, but a healthy and sustainable one nevertheless. As the Lead Pastor, I have to accept the slower growth produced by the challenges of a multicultural environment and celebrate the benefits of a healthy diverse church in pursuit of the ultimate mission of God. Growth in numbers is certainly not the only sign of impact for the kingdom of God.

The literature reviewed explored the theme of diversity in the church and affirmed the relevance of unity within diversity for a healthy ecclesiology. As Thiessen puts it, “communion among those who are ‘others’ is a mark of the church, and not a mere concession to a situation of imperfection” (Thiessen 7). In contrast to the homogenous unit principle advocated by Donald McGavran and Peter C. Wagner, this review found several missiologists and ecclesiologists advocating for multicultural churches to be a more accurate representation of Jesus’ great commission in particular and the mission of God in general (Fong 116-27; Padilla 10). Since the beginning of creation, God is on a mission to bless every nation and bring them into the community of one new multicultural, multilingual humanity (Wright; Oden; Ramirez-Johnson; Stevens; Kwiyani). The literature examined does not point to God being in a hurry. On the contrary, he is taking all the necessary time and effort to get the job done.

The biblical and theological framework for this study explained how the church was conceived as global in a local context. People from eighteen different nations were present during Peter's first sermon on the day of Pentecost. These responded to the gospel and a global church was birthed in Jerusalem. The biblical review traced a line from the nations who stood in defiance to God in Genesis 11 to the great multitude of every nation, tribe, and language worshiping in front of his eternal throne. The mission of God is to restore all his broken creation and bring humankind back together in unity to better reflect his image as he purposed it in the beginning of creation. Since bilingual preaching is a big contributing factor to increase diversity in the local church, I have to conclude that it is a healthy church practice as it reflects a global ecclesiology within the local context. Bilingual preaching is not the only form of healthy church, yet it does add a beneficial dimension of healthy church which monolingual preaching cannot.

### **Major Finding #3: The Benefits of Bilingual Preaching Far Outweigh its Challenges**

For the first three years of La Casa, I continued to monitor the relationship between the vision of the church, our bilingual preaching methodology, and the people it was attracting. As a result, I observed several benefits and challenges to this preaching methodology. In order to decide whether or not to continue implementing this methodology I wanted to know if the benefits outweigh the challenges in the perception of pastors, leaders, and congregants at La Casa. This desire was one of the main reasons behind the current ministry transformation project.

During the research phase, I designed specific questions in the online questionnaire and the focus groups to inquire upon the opinion of La Casa's pastors, leaders, and congregants. Then, I triangulated their answers with the responses of the

external experts interviewed. After the data analysis, the data clearly indicated that these participants perceived way more benefits than challenges to bilingual preaching. The benefits mentioned were grouped in three main categories. The first category was personal benefits, the second was missional benefits, and the third category included cultural benefits. Similarly, the challenges were also grouped in three categories. The first was personal challenges, the second was missional challenges, and the third was logistical challenges. The external experts interviewed agreed with these main benefits and challenges categories. Noticeably, they added way more missional benefits and logistical challenges than the ones observed by the local participants.

Two key observations emerged from the data analysis. First, the number of benefits was significantly higher than the number of challenges. Secondly, the participants did not mention any cultural challenges. Instead, they highlighted several logistical challenges to bilingual preaching. These key observations confirm that the benefits of bilingual preaching outweigh its challenges, and the challenges are more practical than theological. Therefore, by addressing these practical challenges, the whole practice can improve considerably.

The literature review discussed researchers like Jonathan Downie, Cecile B. Vigouroux, and Jill Karlik who mention some benefits and challenges of bilingual preaching (Downie, *Towards a Homiletic* 62-66; Vigouroux 342; Karlik 18-19). Even when interpreted preaching is viewed as a historic church practice, very scarce research exists to guide the best practices needed for it to flourish and fulfill its missiological role. This research aimed to identify and detail these benefits and challenges in order to contribute to future research on the topic in the fields of homiletics and missiology.

Therefore, an extensive list of benefits and challenges emerging from this study has been recorded in Chapter Four under the subheadings benefits and challenges (for a numeric list, see appendix G).

The biblical and theological framework for this research established the high value of cultural diversity for a healthy church. Although the Scriptures do not mention bilingual preaching specifically, the book of Acts highlights the benefits and challenges of multicultural churches. A clear example of challenges is the conflict between Hellenists and Hebrews in regards of the bread distribution for their widows and the apostles' solution to delegate bilingual leaders to address the issue (Acts 6.1-7). A biblical example of benefits is when the men of Cyprus and Cyrene preached to the Hellenists in Antioch and the hand of the Lord was with them and a great number turned to faith (Acts 11.20-21). Then, the church in Antioch became the first multicultural church in history and later on the first missionary sending church (Acts 13.1-3). Imagining bilingual, multicultural congregations more consistently finding and sending cross-cultural missionaries follows a logically practical flow of cause and effect.

**Major Finding #4: Bilingual Preaching Is More Effective When the Preacher and Interpreter Develop an off-stage Relationship with Mutual Respect and a Thorough Reflective Practice**

Through the years, I have witnessed my fair share of great and poor interpreted preaching. As a preacher and an interpreter, I experienced firsthand when the sermon goes smoothly and the audience is fully engaged and when the sermon feels choppy and the listeners are more confused than edified. At the beginning of this study, my intuition was the interpreter is the one responsible for the effectiveness of bilingual preaching. An

experienced, capable, and flexible interpreter can improve the delivery of the bilingual sermon. This observation was based on my experience with interpreted preaching, especially when the preacher speaks in one language and the audience understands only the language of the interpreter.

During the research phase, the data demonstrated that La Casa's pastors and leaders had a different perspective on the matter. Although the participants ranked the interpreter as the most relevant component of effective bilingual preaching, they ranked the culturally attuned preacher as a close second and the interaction between preacher and interpreter a very close third. While analyzing their responses, how they perceived the fluid interaction between preacher and interpreter on stage as very relevant for the effectiveness of the sermon delivery became clear. The targeted discussion of all three focus groups enhanced this idea and confirmed how leaders and congregants perceive the interaction between preacher and interpreter as the most influential factor of their understanding of the sermon. The participants attributed this fluid interaction to the close relationship between preacher and interpreter.

When I interviewed the external experts, the picture became even more clear. Four out of six experts explained how the fluid interaction on-stage was dependent on the off-stage relationship between preacher and interpreter: a relationship based on mutual respect for each other's calling and gifting. At the same time, the relationship has to be a relationship solid enough to withstand a thorough reflective practice. Finally, the preacher and interpreter need to develop a relationship of familiarity, trust, and respect during the week in order to deliver the sermon in a synchronized rhythm like a beautiful duet instead of two competing solos.



The literature reviewed showed how the involvement of the interpreter is boosted by a sense of calling which many church interpreters have. Sari Hokkanen argues God calls people to be church interpreters and “the interpreter can function in the same way a preacher or anyone else speaking, singing or praying in the service does” (306). Tison discovered that interpreters see themselves as called to serve God with their interpreting abilities and see interpretation as a long-term ministry (12). This unique combination causes church interpreters to be more involved in the interpreting task and makes them feel more empowered to interpret and reformulate the sermon in a way they feel is likely to be better understood. Vigoroux goes even further by advocating for a view of preacher and interpreter as “speech acts that are interwoven into a joint performance and are constantly (re)shaping each other” (343). Jonathan Downie and Teresa Parish advocate for the importance of the preacher to see the interpreter as a co-laborer in the ministry of preaching (Downie, *Toward a Homiletic* 65-66; Parish 203-05). For this level of trust and engagement between preacher and interpreter to be displayed on-stage, they must develop an ongoing relationship based on mutual respect. Practically, this means the intentional structuring of pre-preaching meetings into the regular rhythms of pastoral work. Bilingual preaching also requires the preacher to be prepared more in advance than many pastors are for their preaching.

The biblical and theological framework for this study examined thoroughly the idea of unity within diversity. The big story of God shows how he actively brings people together to serve him in unity. Jesus sent his disciples on mission two by two (Luke 10.1). The book of Acts registers several teams of twos traveling and doing ministry together (Acts 3.1, 13.1-2, 15.40, 16.1-3). Although the Scriptures do not refer

specifically to a preacher and an interpreter, the Scriptures do highlight the power of two working together in relational unity to share the gospel. These biblical teams did not just show up on Sunday to preach. They also did life together and related to each other on a regular basis. Similarly, when a preacher and interpreter develop this kind of relationship in their lives, they are able to communicate the message of the gospel together in a powerful, visual representation of unity and blessing.

**Major Finding #5: Bilingual Preaching is Most Effective When the Preacher and Interpreter Work Together as Co-Preachers of the Sermon**

Before the beginning of this research, I believed bilingual preaching already has a certain level of effectiveness in North America. Otherwise, La Casa would not exist and would not have attracted over a hundred and fifty people in three years of existence. Since bilingual preaching achieved a basic level of effectiveness at La Casa, I wanted to know what could make it even more effective. From experience and intuition, I assumed the preacher and the interpreter are the main contributors to increase the effectiveness level. Nevertheless, I was not sure what the ideal power dynamic between these two is.

The previous finding affirmed bilingual preaching is more effective when the preacher and interpreter develop an off-stage respectful relationship, a respectful relationship or perhaps a partnership, yet a partnership with a clear hierarchy where the preacher is the senior and the interpreter is the junior. Nevertheless, during the research a term kept being repeated by several participants from La Casa. The majority of participants viewed the interpreter as a co-preacher, and not just a helper of the lead preacher. During the interaction of all three focus groups, the same view of the interpreter as a co-preacher was prevalent. What brought even more validity to the term is the

opinion of the external experts. These experts viewed the preacher and interpreter as a co-preachers and partners on co-mission to deliver the sermon in two languages. Then, they shared valuable recommendations to help both to walk in the dimension of co-preaching. Nevertheless, they affirmed that even when co-preaching is ideal, co-preaching is extremely difficult and should not be the only option considered for bilingual preaching.

After contemplating all the data collected from the local participants and external experts, I could not but conclude that co-preaching is the most effective way to characterize bilingual preaching. A high level of effectiveness depends on the availability of two empowered preachers who can, and are willing to, work together as a dynamic duo, mutually sharing the burden and the responsibility of each sermon. Evidently, to reach this level of partnership implies both preachers are relatively equally equipped, comfortable to work together, and willing to submit to one another. This is a balance not easily achieved by any means. Nevertheless, when the right relationship is developed, balance is possible. The co-preaching relationship would be a beautiful reflection of the work of the cross which breaks power dynamics and brings people together in submission to Christ and to one another.

The homiletical framework for this study examined the findings of several researchers who have been studying interpreted preaching in the last two decades. In one way or another, they all seem to point towards the interpreter being more than just a channel to transmit the preacher's sermon. Downie advocates for a shift in the homiletical world from preaching through interpreters to preaching with interpreters (Toward a Homiletic 65). Vigoroux concluded that the interpreter acts as a co-performer who reenacts the sermon with the preacher to illustrate "how the Spirit moves through the

preacher and his sermon” (342-43). Tison explains how the interpreter is chosen from within the congregation to ensure doctrinal alignment and is highly regarded as a co-preacher of the sermon (258-59). Karlik found out that most accepted interpreters were preachers in their own right, and she is the first one to use the term co-preacher (167). Finally, Parish examines the work of all these researchers and concludes “the interpreter is more than a mouthpiece for the preacher but is in fact a co-preacher as they help facilitate the sermon through not just equivalent language but also cultural fluency” (240). In the case of bilingual preaching where the audience is bilingual in nature, co-preaching becomes of even greater value. To the person in the audience, the preacher is whoever is speaking her own language.

The biblical foundations section of this research established that God is the originator of languages and cultures. The biblical foundations section also established he has a purpose for bringing diverse cultures and languages together to worship him even through eternity. In addition, the vastness of Jesus’ great commission (Matt. 28.19), and the sense of urgency with which the early church expanded from Jerusalem to Rome in around thirty years are clear indicatives of the role of interpretation and team work in church history. The book of Acts highlights several preaching duos as expressed in the previous finding of this research. These preaching teams did not seem to have one lead preacher with the other being always subservient to the first. Instead, they exemplified true partnership and collaboration. Barnabas brings Paul along to Antioch, and they teach together as a team (Acts 11.25-26). Later on, these two are sent by the church on their first missionary journey with Barnabas in the lead (Acts 13.2). However, somewhere along the way, Paul takes the lead of the team (Acts 13.13). When the two later separate

in Acts 15, Paul chooses Silas to join him while Barnabas takes Mark and equips him for ministry.

These biblical partnerships, in addition to the evidence examined in the theological foundations section, which points to God's delight in unity within diversity could clearly find its fulfillment in the close partnership between two individuals who come together as co-laborers on co-mission to deliver one sermon in two languages to a multicultural church who view and receive them as co-preachers with equal value. Therefore, bilingual preaching is most effective when the preacher and interpreter work together as co-preachers of the sermon.

#### **Major Finding #6: Bilingual Preaching is Central to Pursuing the Vision of La Casa**

Since the beginning, we envisioned La Casa to be a church where Latinos, Anglos, and other ethnicities come together to form a community of disciples, constantly making disciples from the different nations living in the greater Nashville area. As the church planters, my wife and I knew that language is a key factor in forming a multicultural community. We launched La Casa as a fully bilingual church hoping to be able to create the necessary ethos for a multicultural community to form. Nevertheless, a question lingered in our minds: Is bilingual preaching central to pursuing this vision, or can we reach the same objective by holding separate monolingual worship services? After three years of ministry, I embarked on this study to answer this very question.

During the research phase, I asked the participants if bilingual preaching is central to pursuing the vision of La Casa. The majority of participants affirmed bilingual preaching is central to pursue the church's vision. In addition, the answers to the question on the missiological role of bilingual preaching revealed that the majority of participants

believed this preaching methodology plays a relevant role to achieve the church vision. During the discussion of the focus groups, all participants affirmed bilingual preaching sets La Casa apart from any other church they have visited, and they believed the church would not be the same if the preaching methodology shifted to monolingual.

After listening to the local church participants, triangulating their responses with the views of the external experts on what a multicultural church in North America should look like, and considering the people the church continues to attract on a regular basis (a diverse mix of multilingual people), the data clearly demonstrated to me that the kind of multicultural church that we committed ourselves to is enhanced and better expressed by bilingual preaching.

The literature review emphasized the relevance of multicultural churches in the kingdom of God in general. As Kwiyanu puts it, “The Spirit of Jesus unites us together in diversity” (132). In the case of North America in particular, the church needs to employ as many methodologies as needed to reach and integrate the diversity of cultures in its surrounding (Wan 1-5). In most cases, Latinos have developed a bilingual, bicultural life style (Gonzales and Jimenez 17-37). In response to this reality, La Casa opted for a bilingual preaching methodology primarily to reach and integrate Latino families with their Anglo neighbors. Coincidentally, this methodology attracted other minority groups enriching the cultural diversity of the congregation which in turn reinforced the continuity of a fully bilingual service where the entire liturgy is conducted in two languages. As Kim proposes in his acronym DIALECT, the culturally intelligent preacher uses a “delivery method custom made for each cultural context” (24-30).

The biblical and theological foundations sections for this research explored in depth the value of multicultural churches for the mission of God. From the calling of Abraham to be a blessing to all nations (Gen. 12.1-3), to the gathered multitude at the feet of the heavenly throne (Rev. 7.9), God seems determined to bring together a thriving multicultural community of believers. If the divine mind intended for multiplicity of cultures to co-exist and thrive in the world as a greater expression of the creativity and imagination of the Creator (Ramirez-Johnson 253), then a church focused on bringing diversity of cultures and languages to worship together is worth every effort.

Perhaps the church of Antioch is the greatest reminder of what a unified multicultural church means to the kingdom of God. In Antioch, believers were first called Christians. In Antioch where we see the first multicultural ministry team leading and preaching together. From Antioch, the first apostolic mission team was sent to the gentile world (Acts 13.1-3). Fast forwarding to the twenty-first century, any church attempting to follow the multicultural example of the church of Antioch should examine and implement the most effective preaching methodology suited to pursue its vision. Considering that La Casa strives to be a multicultural church integrating Latinos, Anglos, and other ethnicities in one unified congregation, I am convinced bilingual preaching is central to pursuing the vision of the church. A change of methodology would alter the make-up and identity of the congregation.

### **Ministry Implications of the Findings**

The findings of this research provide at least three ministry implications. First, this research found bilingual preaching to be grounded in solid biblical, historical, and theological foundations. The study also found this preaching methodology to be very

beneficial for the purposes of a multicultural church in general and for the vision of the case study church in particular. Therefore, we at La Casa Church will continue to employ bilingual preaching (English/Spanish) in our main weekend services. In addition, considering the numerical growth, the church leadership team should explore the possibility of adding another service, whether in the same format or perhaps in a different format to attract another group of people from the wide diversity of cultures present in the greater Nashville area.

Secondly, this study found the relationship and interaction between the preacher and interpreter to be the most influential factor in the effectiveness level of bilingual preaching. Therefore, La Casa will implement a multilevel protocol to guide this collaborative process (Appendix F). The first level of the protocol is for beginners in bilingual preaching. The recommendations in this level are to assist a guest or an occasional preacher in working with an interpreter of any proficiency level. In the beginner level, the preacher has complete freedom to prepare the sermon as she wishes and has the responsibility to briefly meet with the interpreter prior to the preaching event to go over the sermon notes and direction. In this level, the interpreter can and should ask the preacher for clarification on words or concepts prior to the sermon event. However, he needs to follow the preacher's lead in all matters referring to the sermon. Finally, both preacher and interpreter are offered an opportunity to meet and reflect on their working together experience after the preaching event. This reflective practice is beneficial for any preacher and interpreter who wishes to continue serving in bilingual preaching.

The second level of the protocol is for partners. The recommendations in this level are to guide experienced preachers and interpreters to work together as partners in



delivering the sermon. In this level, the preacher holds the lead on the sermon preparation and delivery, yet he interacts with the interpreter as a partner in ministry and considers her opinions regarding biblical, linguistic, and cultural implications of the sermon. Nevertheless, the interpreter does not have to be a preacher herself. In this level, the preacher and interpreter are expected to meet during the week for a sermon preparation session, a final debriefing to discuss any changes before the sermon event, and a reflective session post sermon to go over their experience of working together.

The third level of the protocol is for co-preachers. The recommendations in this level are to help two experienced preachers to work together as co-preachers of the sermon, whether both or only one of them is bilingual. In this level, the lead preacher holds the main responsibility of crafting the sermon. Nevertheless, he or she involves the co-preacher and welcomes his or her feedback during the preparation stage, while during the delivery stage both lead preacher and co-preacher share the same burden of communicating the message to the congregation. In this level, the co-preachers are encouraged to meet frequently during the week and debate the sermon ideas as needed to fine tune it before they can walk together on stage. As in the previous level, a reflective session would be offered following each preaching event where the co-preachers can share their thoughts on how the sermon went and what should be improved for the next sermon.

The final implication of this study is that bilingual preaching is beneficial and reproducible in North America. I reached this conclusion after the following considerations. First, this study proved how bilingual preaching is effective in communicating the message of the gospel at La Casa Church. Second, this project

showcased how Latinos in particular, and other ethnic groups in general, are increasing in The United States. Third, La Casa is part of a global movement of churches called Every Nation. The vision of this movement is to establish Christ-centered, Spirit-empowered, socially responsible churches and campus ministries in every nation. In line with this vision, this movement needs to explore every possibility to plant healthy multicultural churches to embrace Latinos and other minorities together with the predominant Anglo culture. Fourth, the external experts interviewed for this project affirmed they believed bilingual preaching to be reproducible and beneficial for the purposes of a multicultural church in North America. To the issue of reproducibility, they shared several practices recommended to enable a multicultural church to implement this methodology successfully. The experts also highlighted bilingual preaching is beneficial in North America as it promotes unity, breaks down power dynamics of English colonialism, and projects an inclusive gospel to all cultures and languages.

Finally, the literature reviewed affirmed that all the evidence in the New Testament favors “the formation of churches that would live out the unity of the new humanity in Jesus Christ” (Padilla 10), while the biblical and theological foundations advocated that the God who created languages, cultures, and interpretation is the same God who goes on a mission to gather them back and bless them according to the covenant established with Abraham (Gen. 12.1-3; Rev. 7.9). This same God is calling his people to join him on a mission to redeem every tribe, culture, and language by preaching the eternal gospel of salvation in Christ. In response to this calling, and considering all the findings of this research, I am proposing that bilingual preaching is a beneficial and reproducible methodology to advance the mission of God in North America and beyond.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This project took longer than what was originally expected. The research was paused for several months as I tried to concatenate my practitioner self to my researcher in formation. It was not an easy task to harness the appropriate energy, time, and focus from the demands of planting a church to the meticulous discipline of research. Nevertheless, the delay turned out for the better not only because there was more and broader data to access, but because La Casa itself evolved from its original intent of serving mainly different generations of Latino immigrants to the multicultural church that it quickly became.

The instruments I designed for this study could be fine-tuned for better results. For instance, the ministry team questionnaire aimed to find the perception of people who have been part of La Casa for more than two years and serve in the different ministries of the church. Those individuals were from a variety of ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. The questionnaire could have asked the participants to identify their ethnicity and primary language. Such inquiry would have helped to analyze how such perceptions differ for different people groups. Another limitation in the instrumentation I utilized presented itself during the focus groups discussion. This instrument was designed to collect honest and direct opinions from congregants who have been faithfully attending church for at least one year. However, the Spanish focus group required more perspicacity on the part of the facilitator to elicit honest responses from the participants. Latino culture considers it offensive to give any negative feedback to a leader, particularly a spiritual leader. As one of the participants put it so culturally clear, “if it [bilingual preaching] was not working, we would have already left.”

Finally, this research focused on bilingual preaching in English/Spanish. I designed all the instrumentation with these two languages in mind. For those who want to generalize this study in other languages, they will need to consider the cultural nuances of their target research audience and adjust their instruments accordingly.

### **Unexpected Observations**

One of the earliest unexpected observations of this research occurred during the literature review. I approached the research on the effectiveness level of bilingual preaching as a rather innovative way to respond to the increasingly diverse population in North America. Reviewing the bibliography on the topic resulted in an eye-opening discovery on how prevalent the practice has been throughout church history. After reading on the topic, the necessity of different forms of bilingualism for the expansion of the church became evident. This research is not on an innovative preaching methodology but rather on the contextualization of an ancient Christian practice the church has historically used to fulfill the mission of God. As Downie grippingly asserts, “The church that was born interpreting ought to embrace its origins” (Sermon Interpreting 66).

A second unexpected observation was the inseparable connection between bilingual preaching and bilingual worship. This research was set to study the effectiveness level of bilingual preaching. Therefore, no question was asked regarding any of the other components of the worship service. Yet, the subject of worship came up repeatedly among the focus groups discussion. Despite the delimitations of this research, the integrity of the worship service and particularly the interconnection of worship and sermon makes it nearly impossible for the participants to separate the sermon from the

entirety of their worship experience. For this reason, praise and worship needs to be thought out and addressed in a parallel way to the preaching event.

Another unforeseen observation of this research was how bilingual preaching benefits people whose first language is neither English or Spanish. Since its early beginnings, La Casa has attracted people from different nationalities beyond the Americas. The initial concern was that people who are neither English or Spanish speakers may feel excluded from the life of the congregation, yet several of the participants expressed their sense of ease and familiarity as they feel they do not have to speak English perfectly to be accepted and that they can invite their non-Hispanic, non-Anglo friends to church and anticipate them to also feel welcome and included.

### **Recommendations**

The purpose of this project was to examine the effectiveness level of bilingual preaching in communicating the message of the gospel to a multicultural church in North America. While the findings and implications of this study points towards this preaching methodology being effective and reproducible in North America, the following recommendations could enhance its fruitfulness:

1. Churches who consider adopting bilingual preaching should think through their vision, ecclesiological, and missiological reasons behind adopting this methodology. The challenges and complexities associated with bilingual preaching need to be considered by every church planting team, especially in light of their particular context. The present research cannot assume that different contexts would render the same results. Variables, like culture, language, and population density need to be thoroughly considered.

2. Bilingual preaching should be a means to an end, not a goal in itself. The goal is to establish healthy multicultural churches. This study is not advocating for bilingual preaching as a replacement or even an improvement on monolingual preaching. This study simply states the discovery that bilingual preaching is a historic church practice which continues to effectively communicate the message of the gospel in the context where it is designed for, namely being a healthy multicultural church reaching across language barriers. The aim should always be to establish healthy multicultural churches. The biblical and theological foundations for this research, in addition to the literature review and all the participant responses, affirm that multicultural churches are a better expression of God himself, his mission, and his people. Therefore, I recommend that churches in North America consider becoming multicultural in essence, and if bilingual preaching serves their particular context and purpose, then use it.

3. This study found bilingual preaching to be intrinsically related to the worship experience in particular and the whole church liturgy in general. Therefore, each church team should think through their service and decide what elements need to be bilingual and to what degree. Then, they can elaborate a step-by-step plan to guide the process. For instance, bilingual worship could include alternating languages in the same song, a full song in each language, or even a full worship set in one language, and then alternate languages the next service. The teaching in children ministry could be in English only, since even minority children prefer to speak English. Nevertheless, the children ministry leadership should be bilingual to communicate effectively with parents. Greeters, hospitality, guest services, media, prayer, and even church communication should consider the bilingual reality to insure everyone feels welcome and valued.

4. Bilingual preaching is a team-oriented effort requiring a certain level of coordination in the sermon preparation and delivery by the preacher and interpreter. Regardless of how each church views the role of the interpreter (translator, partner, or co-preacher), their participation implies a certain level of coordination with the preacher. Therefore, church should have a clear written protocol to guide this process. For example, the preacher and the interpreter could be asked to meet for a few minutes prior to the preaching event to get familiarized with each other. Another example could be to recommend the preaching duo to meet after each sermon they preach together to reflect on how it went and what could be improved the next time.

5. Offering ongoing trainings for regular preachers and interpreters would be highly beneficial. The need for training the interpreter is well established in the literature reviewed. However, this research found that not only the interpreter or co-preacher needs training, but the lead preacher himself needs training as well to be able to work effectively with an interpreter. For instance, most preachers are not used to the pause necessary for the interpreter to speak in her language. Regardless of how experienced preachers are, if they have not practiced preaching with interpretation before, they will need to be trained in the dynamics of bilingual preaching.

Finally, I am writing these words while the news is dominated by gigantic leaps in the industry of artificial intelligence. Strong possibilities exist that the time is coming when the AI technology will be able to take the place of the interpreter and deliver the message directly to the ear of the audience in real time. The question I would like to present for further research is: When the time comes, would we simply surrender church interpretation to AI or does the unity portrayed by the image of two co-preachers sharing

the pulpit and the spotlight justify for the homiletical and missiological communities to make long-term room for this methodology in the practice of ministry?

### **Postscript**

The journey of this project has been a true blessing to me in more ways than I can express. As I look back into my own life journey, I cannot help but to see the sovereignty of God intertwined with the freedom of choice he has gifted us with. My journey with languages began at a young age when my father encouraged me to learn as many languages as I could. By age nine, I was already fluent in three languages, one of them being English. At age sixteen, God called me to be a missionary to Bolivia where he gifted me the Spanish language in a matter of weeks. At age eighteen, I witnessed my first interpreted sermon, and it impacted me greatly. That day I decided to take the languages God blessed me with and turn it into the useful skill of church interpreting.

My journey at Asbury Theological Seminary began with a simple visit to campus in 2010 where Dr. Milton Lowe encouraged me to apply for the Doctor of Ministry program. After applying and being admitted the same year, I was unable to join for personal reasons. In 2016, I was invited again and encouraged to apply. Once again, I was admitted to the program, yet financial reasons did not allow me to enroll. Finally, I was able to enroll and begin my doctoral studies in the spring of 2018. Should I have started before, I probably would have never pursued this particular project. In fact, at the beginning of the program I had another project in mind for my research. However, when my wife and I launched La Casa in the Fall of 2019, it became evident that bilingual preaching is what I needed to focus on. Nevertheless, the demands of church planting



forced me to delay my studies while the church was being established. This turned out to be a blessing in disguise since after a few years of weekly bilingual preaching experience, this study became broader and even more relevant in my mind.

Today, I can sincerely say that this project has transformed me personally in many ways. Perhaps, the most important transformation is acquiring the perseverance and resilience needed to continue all the way to the finish line. This Doctor of Ministry journey took me five long years to complete, but it was worth every step of the way.

## APPENDIX A

### BILINGUAL PREACHING COMPONENTS QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire was presented online via Survey Monkey to La Casa's Ministry Team members who freely agreed to participate in the research. The first page of the online questionnaire asked the following:

Do you willingly choose to participate in this questionnaire?

- I agree
- I disagree

Questions:

1. Below is a list of the basic components of bilingual preaching found in most literature on the subject. Please, think about your experience at La Casa Church for the last 6 months, and rank these components in the order of their importance to your experience of bilingual preaching.
  - a. Culturally attuned preacher.
  - b. Appropriately chosen biblical text.
  - c. Fully bilingual interpreter.
  - d. Listeners who value bilingual contexts
  - e. Signs of the Holy Spirit's presence.
  - f. Balanced time/content approach.
  - g. Fluid preacher/interpreter interaction in the pulpit.
2. Which of these reflects better the role of the interpreter in bilingual preaching?
  - a. Someone who translates whatever the preacher says into another language.
  - b. Someone who helps the preacher to deliver the sermon in another language.
  - c. An active partner who works with the primary preacher to deliver the central content the primary preacher speaks.
  - d. A co-preacher who works side by side with the preacher to deliver the sermon in two languages with alternating preacher/interpreter roles for each preacher.
3. When listening to bilingual preaching at La Casa, you find yourself:
  - a. Focusing only on your primary (or only) language.
  - b. Listening to your primary language and trying to understand the other one.
  - c. Battling distraction from the alternation between languages and speakers.
  - d. A combination of A and C
  - e. A combination of B and C

4. From your observation at La Casa, please qualify each one of these statements as True or False:
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Bilingual preaching is a viable preaching method at a multicultural church.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Bilingual preaching is suitable for the specific context of La Casa.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Bilingual preaching is central to pursuing the vision of La Casa.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Bilingual preaching is generally desirable for most attenders at La Casa.
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Bilingual preaching is sometimes necessary but not ideal.
5. Given that bilingual preaching requires more time to deliver the same content than monolingual preaching, which of the following best fits your perspective on La Casa's preaching:
  - a. La Casa typically delivers less content than I would like because of the constraints of time and translation.
  - b. La Casa typically preaches too long because of the desire to deliver the same content in two languages.
  - c. La Casa's preaching has an ideal blend of rich content and efficiency of time.
6. In your judgment, what are the most significant benefits of bilingual preaching over monolingual preaching? What are the most significant detriments of bilingual preaching over monolingual preaching?
7. What do you typically think and/or feel when the preacher or the interpreter is speaking in a language you do not understand during the bilingual sermon?
8. What methods have you observed preachers and interpreters at La Casa use to gain and maintain your attention during the bilingual sermon? Which of these methods are most helpful? Which are least helpful?
9. How long would you estimate the average sermon at La Casa lasts?
10. In your opinion, how does bilingual preaching play a unique role in the fulfillment of the mission of God, to redeem people from every nation, tribe, and language (Revelation 7:9-12)?

## **APPENDIX B**

### **BENEFITS-CHALLENGES FOCUS GROUP**

There were three focus groups selected. Group A, Spanish. Group B, English, and Group C bilingual. Each participant was given a consent form to sign their agreement to participate in the focus group they were assigned.

#### Questions for the Focus Group Discussion

1. What are the main benefits of bilingual preaching at La Casa?
2. What are the main challenges or detriments of bilingual preaching at La Casa?
3. In your opinion, are the benefits of bilingual preaching good enough to outweigh its challenges?
  - a. Please explain your answer either yes or no.
4. In what specific ways does bilingual preaching affect your understanding of the sermon?
5. What do you think is the role of the interpreter in the bilingual preaching event? What determines whether they play that role well or poorly?
6. How do you feel about the interaction between preacher and interpreter in the pulpit? What components of that interaction do you want to keep? What might help that interaction improve?
7. Is there anything else you would like to share about your thoughts on bilingual preaching?

## APPENDIX C

### BILINGUAL PREACHING EXPERT INTERVIEW

- Introduce myself, the purpose of the research, and the context of La Casa.
- Explain that the participation is voluntary and the interviewee can opt out at any time.

Questions for the semi-structured interview

1. Please introduce yourself and explain your current ministry context.
2. In your opinion what are the characteristic components of bilingual preaching that distinguishes it from monolingual preaching?
3. What do you consider to be the main benefits of bilingual preaching in North America?
4. What do you see as the main challenges to bilingual preaching in North America?
5. What methods, practices or ways of being would increase the effectiveness level of bilingual preaching?
6. What methods, practices, or ways of being would help bilingual preaching to become reproducible in North America?
7. From your experience do people feel bilingual preaching adds value to their lives?  
If so what value is added that is most important to them? (i.e. desire to learn another language, expansion of their world view, etc)
8. Do you believe bilingual preaching has a role to play in a multicultural church beyond the communication of the sermon? If so, please explain your thoughts.
9. Since bilingual preaching takes longer than monolingual preaching, how do you manage the tension between time and content for bilingual preaching?
10. Is there anything else you would like to add?

## APPENDIX D

### INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

#### Effectiveness Level of Bilingual Preaching

You are invited to be in a research study being conducted by ***Fikri Youssef***, a **doctoral candidate** at Asbury Theological Seminary. You are invited because *you are part of the ministry team at La Casa Church, and you understand the vision and values of La Casa. In addition, you have listened to bilingual preaching for a period of 2 years.*

If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to fill out an online questionnaire regarding your opinions of bilingual preaching. The questionnaire will take approximately 30 to 45 minutes of your time. Your responses will be collected anonymously via Survey Monkey and used for the purposes of this research only.

This online questionnaire will not collect neither your name nor any of your personal information, therefore your participation is strictly confidential. Once you submit your responses online, it will be sent to the researcher confidentially without any of your personal information, and it will be assigned a code to identify them in the research. For example (participant # 1).

Although any research includes a certain level of risk, there are no known risks for this particular research, especially given that your participation is anonymous and online. The two main benefits of this study are: 1. Help La Casa's preaching team to improve their bilingual preaching at the church's services. 2. Discern if this preaching methodology is recommendable for other multicultural church planting efforts in North America.

If something makes you feel uncomfortable in any way while you are in the study, please tell ***Margot Youssef*** who can be reached at (***margot@lacasachurch.org***). You can refuse to respond to any or all of the questions, and you will be able to withdraw from the process at any time without penalty.

If you have any questions about the research study, please contact (***Margot Youssef***) at (***margot@lacasachurch.org***).

Signing this paper means that you have read this or had it read to you, and that you want to be in the study. If you do not want to be in the study, do not sign the paper. Being in the study is up to you, and no one will be upset if you do not sign this paper or even if you change your mind later. You agree that you have been told about this study and why it is being done and what to do.

---

Signature of Person Agreeing to be in the Study

---

Date Signed

## APPENDIX E

### CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

I, \_\_\_\_\_, will be assisting the *Researcher* in recording the data during the focus group interviews to examine the effectiveness level of bilingual preaching at La Casa Church.

Therefore, I agree to abide by the following guidelines regarding confidentiality:

1. Hold in strictest confidence the identification of any individual(s) that may be revealed during the course of performing research tasks throughout the research process, and after it is complete.
2. Keep all the research information shared with me confidential by not discussing or sharing the research information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) with anyone other than the *Researcher*.
3. Keep all research information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) secure while it is in my possession (e.g., using a password protected computer).
4. Return all research information in any form or format (e.g., disks, tapes, transcripts) to the *Researcher* when I have completed the research tasks.
5. After consulting with the *Researcher*, erase or destroy all research information in any form, or format regarding this research project that is not returnable to the Researcher(s) (e.g., information stored on computer hard drive) upon completion of the research tasks.

---

(Print Name)

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(Signature)

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(Date)

*Researcher:*

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(Print Name)

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(Signature)

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(Date)

## **APPENDIX F**

### **BILINGUAL PREACHING PROTOCOL**

Bilingual preaching is a collaborative effort between the preacher and interpreter. There are at least three possible levels of collaboration. The following are basic guidelines for each level.

#### **Beginners**

These are some recommendations to assist a guest or an occasional preacher in working with an interpreter of any proficiency level. Monolingual preachers with little or no experience in bilingual preaching need more details on how to work effectively with an interpreter. Similarly, interpreters need clear guidelines on how to work with an unfamiliar preacher.

1. Guest or occasional preachers should be paired with the most experienced interpreter available to help them with the dynamics of interpretation.
2. Beginners or inexperienced interpreters should be paired with the most experienced bilingual preacher available to help them get comfortable with the practice.
3. The preacher has complete freedom to prepare the sermon on his/her own.
4. The preacher sends the Scriptures and any sermon notes to the interpreter at least two days before the preaching event.
5. The preacher and interpreter meet in person or online for a desirable 30 minutes to go over the sermon notes before the preaching event.



6. The interpreter can and should ask questions for clarification on words, concepts, jokes, illustrations, or anything that would help to faithfully portray the intent of the preacher.
7. The interpreter should explain any cultural or linguistic challenges for translation he/she finds in the preacher's notes or general sermon direction.
8. In the unlikely event of the interpreter finding any doctrinal issue conflicting with the church teachings, he/she should bring it up directly to the Senior Pastor.
9. The preacher and interpreter are recommended to meet after the sermon for a brief session of reflection. The questions for this reflective session are attached below.

### **Partners**

The following recommendations are to guide preachers and interpreters who are experienced in bilingual preaching to work together as partners in delivering the sermon.

1. In this level, both the preacher and interpreter are experienced in bilingual preaching, yet the interpreter does not need to be a preacher, he or she could just be proficient in church interpreting, or could be a preacher in training as well.
2. The preacher holds the lead on the sermon preparation and delivery process. However, he or she interacts with the interpreter and considers his or her opinions regarding the biblical, linguistical, and cultural content of the sermon.
3. The preacher and interpreter are expected to meet twice before the preaching. An initial meeting during the sermon preparation stage, and another meeting once the sermon notes are finalized to discuss any changes in the sermon direction before the preaching event.

4. The preacher and interpreter would meet for a robust reflective session, using the same questions as the previous level, to evaluate their experience of working together.
5. To increase the level of familiarity between preacher and interpreter, the preaching team would schedule informal gatherings, where relationships can be forged in biblical *agape*.

### **Co-preachers**

The following recommendations are to help two experienced preachers to work together as co-preachers of the sermon, whether both of them or only one is bilingual.

1. This is the highest level of collaboration in bilingual preaching where two equipped and experienced preachers work together to deliver the sermon in two languages.
2. In co-preaching, one speaker is tasked with the lead preacher responsibilities, while the other who is fully bilingual becomes the co-preacher of the sermon.
3. It is possible for both the lead preacher and co-preacher to be bilingual. In which case, they are encouraged to switch languages during the sermon delivery. When the co-preachers switch languages, it allows both sides to experience the sermon firsthand.
4. The lead preacher holds the main responsibility of crafting the sermon, however she involves the co-preacher during the preparation stage. For instance, the lead preacher could ask the co-preacher to do portions of the exegetical analysis of the text, or provide feedback on the focus, function, and future statements of the sermon.

5. The co-preachers share the spiritual burden of the sermon. This means they are both praying and believing together for the sermon to produce the intended life transformation.
6. The co-preachers share the homiletical responsibility of delivering the sermon. This will require meeting as much as needed during the week to agree on jokes, illustrations, stories, and even practice how to deliver the sermon together in a synchronized way.
7. Considering that co-preaching is a long-term ministry, the reflective session after each sermon should be extensive, honest, detailed, and rooted in a sincere desire to help each other in becoming the most effective possible in bilingual preaching.

**Reflective Practice Questions**

1. What went right in the sermon delivery?
2. Were there any challenging words or concepts to communicate in another language?
3. Were there any surprising changes to the sermon notes or direction?
4. Were there any awkward moments on either side during the sermon delivery?
5. What could be improved in the sermon presentation or translation?

## **APPENDIX G**

### **BENEFITS/CHALLENGES OF BILINGUAL PREACHING**

#### **Benefits of Bilingual Preaching**

The following are three categories of benefits found for bilingual preaching:

##### **Personal Benefits**

1. Clarifies the sermon concepts better for those who can understand both languages.
2. Increases the sermon's level of impact since each language has its own impact.
3. Allows bilingual listeners to keep connected to their cultural roots.
4. Brings a sense of enjoyment and familiarity, a feeling of being at home.
5. Allows for friendships and relationships to form among people unlikely to connect otherwise.
6. Allows for husbands and wives who are from different language backgrounds to enjoy the sermon together.
7. Provides an opportunity for Anglo children from a young age to make friends with children from other nations in a safe and relatable environment.
8. The pause for translation between languages allows the listeners to digest and comprehend the sermon better.
9. Provides a feeling of safety and familiarity for those who speak English with an accent.
10. Allows for immigrant parents and children to receive the same message and worship together in the same church.
11. Makes room for Latinos and Anglos to connect in a safe environment.

12. Helps immigrants to learn and practice English among friends.
13. Develops a sense of comfort and familiarity with non-Latinos.
14. Provides Latino immigrants with a sense of joy as they find themselves part of a unique church experience.
15. Expands the biblical vocabulary of the bilingual listeners who can compare the same teaching in two languages.
16. Increases engagement as it facilitates a more active participation in the experience, regardless of which language the listener knows and is focusing upon.

### **Missional Benefits**

17. Makes room for a cohesive unity of people from different cultures worshipping together in the same room.
18. Allows bilingual listeners to invite all their relational network, as they usually have both monolingual and bilingual friends.
19. Allows for a broader understanding of context, cultures, and different perspectives.
20. Bridges the gap between cultures and people groups in a practical way.
21. Reaches the growing number of Latino immigrants in the United States.
22. Develops a bigger mindset of church leadership.
23. Demonstrates Revelation 7:9-12 in a practical way.
24. Raises up leaders to minister in their own language.
25. Trains missionaries for the mission field in North America and the nations.
26. Builds a bridge to further ministry among different ethnic groups.
27. Helps develop a great passion for reaching the nations for Christ.

28. Increases church health because it carries a more biblical DNA.
29. Increases church sustainability and longevity since the church is not reaching only one culture that could be extinguished in the future from a geographical area.
30. Deepens and enriches cultural hermeneutics and homiletics in proclamation.
31. Incarnates a global ecclesiology.
32. Promotes a ministry of cultural reconciliation as presented in Ephesians 2:13-14.

### **Cultural Benefits**

33. the benefit of witnessing how different people groups enjoy a meal together during the bilingual sermon.
34. Promotes a sense of inclusivity and acceptance. Basically, the bilingual church's message is come as you are, no matter what language or culture you are from, there is room for you.
35. Enriches the entire congregation with cultural diversity.
36. Highlights the equality of both cultures by featuring their languages side-by-side on stage.
37. Creates an inclusive diverse community welcoming to anyone who speaks English, Spanish or both.
38. Pushes back against racism and displays God's heart for all nations.
39. Promotes social integration by breaking down power dynamics and English colonialism.
40. Promotes patience in the listeners, which is a fruit of the Spirit.

### **Challenges of Bilingual Preaching**

The following are three categories of challenges found for bilingual preaching:

### **Personal Challenges**

1. The back and forth between two languages is distracting and it is easy to lose focus.
2. Worship songs in two languages intercalated is difficult and can be off putting.

### **Missional Challenges**

3. It is difficult to form an authentic community with those who do not speak the same language. Eventually friendships will form and deepen within the same language group.
4. Bilingual preaching attracts a smaller potential audience by default resulting in slower growth than monolingual churches.
5. Bilingualism can be a cringe factor for monolingual first-time guests.
6. This methodology is difficult to replicate as it depends on developing great interpreters, and preachers willing to work together in the sermon delivery.

### **Logistical Challenges**

7. Demands more logistical efforts than monolingual preaching.
8. Jokes do not translate well from one language to another. It takes great effort from the interpreter to find an equivalency. It also takes forethought from the preacher to find more easily translatable jokes.
9. Bilingual preaching takes more time than monolingual, which is a cultural cringe factor for North American listeners specifically.
10. Untrained preachers who are not used to working with an interpreter, and constantly speaks over the interpreter.
11. Finding and training interpreters for bilingual preaching is very demanding.

12. Preachers need to be trained as well for bilingual preaching, and they need to prepare a rich content to keep the audience engaged during the sermon delivery.
13. Requires the preacher to be more aware of accent, mannerisms, jokes, and even cultural nuances.
14. Limits certain preaching styles and tools as they do not translate well. Wordplay, acrostics, and other tools which work well in one language hardly ever work in two languages.
15. Requires a huge investment of time and effort to train the entire leadership team for bilingual ministry (greeters, children, prayer team etc...).
16. Produces a certain level of messiness, just like the situation described in Acts 6 with the Hebrews and the Hellenists.
17. Requires a big sacrifice. All parties involved need to sacrifice something in order to be part of a bilingual church.
18. Bilingual preaching the Western comfort. North Americans in general are used to going on mission trips where they speak with an interpreter to the locals, but when it happens in their own land it feels uncomfortable.



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