Can Multicultural Social Theory Help Us in Leading Multicultural Faith Communities?

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ABSTRACT
This paper was developed as an exploration of multicultural social theory within the Canadian context and the interplay of this theory with the practice of Christian ministry. A review of the current state of multiculturalism in Canada is offered along with an identification of factors pertinent to the discussion. The relationship between multiculturalism, theology of mission and the place of culture in Christian congregations is explored. Finally some suggestions are indicated where multicultural social theory may inform the development of better practices in multi-ethnic congregations. Keywords: multiculturalism, culture, intercultural, multicultural common spaces, culturally-competent leaders

Making Sense of Multicultural Social Theory

Multiculturalism. We can stop right there. In any gathering of Canadians, the mention of “multiculturalism” will automatically elicit endless talking points, pros and cons, supporters and detractors, and very little satisfactory resolution. Exactly.

Multiculturalism is always a current topic in Canadian public dialogue. On the one hand it appears to have a high level of public support, with 82% agreeing that “the preservation and enhancement of the multicultural heritage of Canadians is an objective that the government should support” (Jedwab 2002, 2). On the other it seems to be a festering threat to our social fabric as a nation. A book reviewer for the Canadian Review of Sociology (http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1755-618X.2009.01204.x/abstract) commented regarding multiculturalism and alleged hatemongering by the Canadian weekly current affairs magazine, Maclean’s, “An online search of Maclean’s archives in August 2008 turned up 94 headlines, of which the vast majority was cautionary, pessimistic, or downright alarming” (McGregor 2009, 87).

The debate goes something like this:
• Does multiculturalism give too much emphasis to our differences and as a result does it detract from an identification of common values and a strong sense of citizenship?
• Does multiculturalism encourage bonding and/or what is often referred to as “cohesion,” which is increasingly deemed essential to societal harmony?
• Is multiculturalism a threat to French identity in Canada?
• Is multiculturalism a threat to aboriginal identity in Canada?
• Does multiculturalism create or remove barriers to full and equal participation in Canadian society?

Let’s pause for a moment to define our talking point. In 1971, the Prime Minister of Canada made the following statement to the House of Commons, in response to the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, Book IV, The Cultural Contribution of the Other Ethnic Groups. By this statement the Canadian government accepted a policy that,
“commends itself to the Government as the most suitable means of assuring the cultural freedom of Canadians. Such a policy should help to break down discriminatory attitudes and cultural jealousies. National unity, if it is to mean anything in the deeply personal sense, must be founded on confidence in one's own individual identity; out of this can grow respect for that of others and a willingness to share ideas, attitudes and assumptions. A vigorous policy of multiculturalism will help create this initial confidence. It can form the base of a society which is based on fair play for all. The Government will support and encourage the various cultures and ethnic groups that give structure and vitality to our society. They will be encouraged to share their cultural expressions and values with other Canadians and so contribute to a richer life for all” (Government of Canada 1971).

Thus, the policy of multiculturalism seeks to improve intergroup harmony by:

- encouraging all ethnic groups in Canada to develop themselves as vital communities, and
- encouraging their mutual interaction and sharing.

The assumption, which is quite explicit in the policy, “is that such group development will lead to a personal and collective sense of confidence, and this in turn will lead to greater ethnic tolerance” (Berry 1984, 353).

Now almost 40 years after that political validation of the worth of all cultures contributing to our collective reality we continue to discuss the practical realities. Recently we have had a debate in Ontario over the acceptance of Shariah law and Quebec’s Consultation Commission on Accommodation Practices Related to Cultural Differences (see http://www.accommodations.qc.ca/commission/mandat-en.html). Following the release of the Quebec report, commentator Tahir Aslam Gora wrote this critique in The Hamilton Spectator:

in their findings, they have emphasized the importance of Canadians understanding immigrants’ cultures rather than urging immigrants to learn about their host country.

The general public’s lack of knowledge or interest in this report indicates one more reality—that ordinary people don’t feel such solutions work on the ground. Our governments should have understood by now that such reports don’t make much sense to the public.

Many citizens have strong negative feelings about some immigrant communities looking for different laws and norms in this country. They especially react to the demands of some fundamental Islamic groups.

The report is full of all the old rhetoric, including granting rights to religious holidays to all immigrant communities, comparing them with traditional Christian holidays.

It looks like some of our multicultural policy-makers are trying to turn Canada into an arm of the United Nations. They don’t want to see Canada as a country with its own values and norms. They show their pride in turning Canada into a country of hodgepodge laws where some Sikhs are walking to school with their kirpans (ceremonial sword) and some Sikhs are asking that Canadian law be overturned so they can wear turbans instead of motorcycle helmets or safety hard hats.

Similarly, feel-good academics, policy-makers and their associated commissions want to present Canada as a role model to the world, a country where one can regularly see veil/burka-wearing Muslim female drivers, delivering a message across the world how great a multicultural society this country is.
Such commissions, fascinated by their own fantasies, do not understand the fragmentation level within those religion-bound immigrant communities.

Rather, these commissions are causing more division. They have no clue that the rights they are advocating in certain communities are already bones of contention within those circles (Gora 2008).

In the by-line at the conclusion of his rant against multiculturalism, Mr. Gora identifies himself as a Pakistani-Canadian. Exactly.

Have the government and the courts really gone too far to accommodate religious and cultural sensitivities at the price of eroding the equality rights that Canadians hold so dear? Or is this just a simplistic reduction of a complex phenomenon into abstract dichotomies: diversity or cohesion, equality or freedom? Is Canadian multiculturalism a recent post-modern, pluralistic, pragmatic response to our present immigration challenges? Something Pierre Trudeau foisted upon us almost half a century ago? Or is our present story just the continuing emergence of the historic interplay between our everyday lives and our organizing institutions; between our personal experiences with difference, and the public arena in which we seek to make sense of those experiences?

Canadian social philosopher, John Ralston Saul has put forward an intriguing notion in his recent book *A Fair Country: Telling Truths about Canada* (2008). Saul argues that Canada is a Metis nation, heavily influenced and shaped by aboriginal ideas such as: egalitarianism, proper balance between individual and group, and an inclination toward negotiation rather than violence. He says all the important traits we Canadians feel we inherited from Western Civilization—tolerance, inclusiveness and fairness—we have actually learned from Canada’s native peoples.

As settlements of immigrants, we profited from the values and practices of the aboriginal peoples we met on the shores of the St Lawrence River, the Great Lakes and Hudson’s Bay. We then, in turn, marginalized the peoples who passed those values and practices on to us. The discussion started all over again on the Plains of Abraham—whose values, languages, and practices will triumph? The discussion continued at Confederation—whose values, cultures, and practices will triumph? Aboriginal, French, Scot/English/Irish, Scandinavian/German/Ukrainian, Italian/Portuguese/Greek, Caribbean/Hong Kong, Vietnamese/Cambodian/Sri Lankan, up to the present day, Indian, Pilipino, and Chinese?

The geography shaped our responses as well; we just kept shifting around and giving each other enough space so we did not have to assimilate into the group that arrived before us. We begin to see that the choices we have made in constructing our social reality here in Canada, over many generations, are driven as much by psychological predispositions (we are grateful that we were given social/physical space to live according to our cultural practices for as short, or as long as we desired); as by pragmatic political motives—whether King George III, Sir John A McDonald, Brian Mulroney or Jean Chretien.

The suggestion here is that it is the exploring of relations, rather than underlining of differences that is truly representative of Canadian multiculturalism. People of differing cultures are given the space to express their distinctive identities and in so doing construct and reinforce a cohesive unity that respects, includes and incorporates. “What appears distinctive about Canadian institutions is their extraordinary capacity to embody conflicting principles within structures ambiguous enough to allow for ad hoc accommodations over time” (Tuohy 1992).
We welcome differences, we reject differences, we talk them out, we argue and state our positions, we crawl along behind an Amish horse and buggy, we get ticked off with a Somali cab driver, we love Chinese food, even if I can’t understand my waiter—and perogies are Canadian, aren’t they? Exactly.

Queens University professor, Will Kymlicka helps us to navigate the space between the multicultural state and the intercultural citizen. The multicultural state creates constitutions, charters, institutions, and legal structures that fairly allow citizens who are the product of multiple cultures to live together with respect and civility. The individual learns to engage comfortably with the beliefs, values and behaviours of her neighbour in a manner that ultimately calls for adjustment on all sides. The encounter with difference, with the Other is transformative; change, adjustment does emerge.

Ideally, these two levels should work together in any conception of citizenship: there should be a “fit” between our model of the multicultural state and our model of the intercultural citizen. The sort of multicultural reforms we seek at the level of the state should help nurture and reinforce the desired forms of intercultural skills and knowledge at the level of individual citizens. Conversely, the intercultural dispositions we encourage within individual citizens should help support and reinforce the institutions of a multicultural state (Kymlicka 2003, 148).

Kymlicka also identifies challenges to living as intercultural citizens in a multicultural state.

• We may be more inclined to be interculturally generous and inquisitive when travelling in southern Mexico than we are with the Mexican migrant workers wandering about our small town in southwestern Ontario on a summer Saturday evening. Local makes it concrete, not just an abstract idea.
• Learning to accept and value the perspective of my “different” neighbor may require levels of mutual understanding for which I am not prepared either with knowledge or skills. The differences may overwhelm (Kymlicka 2003, 166).

Perhaps it is precisely at this point that we begin to recognize the missing element to this whole discussion. We believe that pieces of this puzzle are held in the intentions of the God who created and sustains humanity.

• The incarnational mission of God calls us to be local, to be concrete. We cannot build a new macro-society; this kingdom stuff is like a mustard seed. We must start in our own communities to be intercultural citizens. (To re-coin Oswald J Smith’s motto, if my neighbour has not heard the good news once, why are we sending mission teams to Kenya where they have heard it twice!)
• And the image of God present in my “different” neighbor calls me to learn and develop skills for communicating across the divide that seems overwhelming.

What is missing in our multicultural state are those local spaces where people of different cultures are recognized and accepted—that they have something to contribute to our development as kingdom people. What is missing are kingdom people who persevere through the differences, who acquire knowledge and skills, so that our increasingly diverse congregations are not overwhelmed by the differences.

Over 15 years ago, one of our preeminent Canadian missiologists, Jonathon Bonk, unequivocally stated, “Trudeau was right and Bibby was wrong” (Bonk 1993, 433). (Reginald Bibby is a Canadian sociologist who wrote Mosaic Madness: Pluralism without a Cause.) It is time we bring our internationally-acquired knowledge, theological and missiological reflections and intercultural skill-set into this dialogue in the Canadian evangelical community.
Multicultural Social Theory and the Mission

What do our understandings and acquired practices in cross-cultural mission bring to this discussion within the Canadian evangelical community?

We know that language, culture and personality are the basic building blocks of human identity. We believe that identity is a distorted, broken picture of the image of God. Since culture is a product of the interaction of human beings in a particular place and time, then culture must also reflect something of the image of God as well as the corruptions, the distortions, created by human self-love and disobedience (Newbigin 1989, 185).

God therefore is inextricably involved with the processes of identity and difference. And Volf indicates that “it may not be too much to claim that the future of our world will depend on how we deal with identity and difference” (Volf 1996, 20).

Canadian social philosopher Charles Taylor indicates that “what we are asked to recognize is the unique identity of this individual or group, their distinctiveness from everyone else. The idea is that it is precisely this distinctness that has been ignored, glossed over, assimilated to a dominant or majority identity. And this assimilation is the cardinal sin against the ideal of authenticity” (Taylor 1994, 38).

We can find the common ground, and insist on assimilation and superficial accommodations, but what do we do with the damages to individual identity, identity which is rooted in the differences? How does the missio dei’s call to shalom, and the missio ekklesia’s call to particularity aid our understanding of this discussion?

By entering into other cultures as learners, some of us have come to find and understand the clues that help us communicate appropriately; we know we have been required to adjust, adapt and shift both our ways of thinking and our ways of acting. Our identities have been transformed – reframed (Taylor, 1994). We who have taken those steps become microcosms of the multicultural, one new humanity; we are becoming Volf’s “catholic personality” (Gundry-Volf and Volf 1997). We have learned that wherever the gospel is preached it is preached in a human language, in the language of a particular culture; wherever a Christian community tries to live out the gospel, it emerges in the shape of a particular human culture (Newbigin 1989, 189).

That is the mission given to the Church; and then we begin to find ways for those particular Jesus-communities to engage with the wider family of the kingdom—and all of a sudden we meet other cultures and other ways of expressing what it means to be a Christian community. We find that we are, in fact, invited to adopt a kingdom identity, which moves us out beyond our own culture, to become aliens and strangers, marginalized in our own cultures. In the second century, Diognetus described Christians this way: “They dwell in their country, but simply as sojourners. As citizens, they share in all things as if foreigners. Every foreign land is to them as their native country and every country of their birth as a land of strangers” (Yaconelli 1989, 212-13).

We are called to begin to recover shalom in our actions with Jesus-followers from other cultures. We begin to re-imagine what grace-purpose God might have had in mind with the proliferation of languages and cultures from ancient times. We have to decide whether we will commit ourselves to receive correction from “the other.”

“The only way in which the gospel can challenge our culturally-conditioned interpretations of it is through the witness of those who read the Bible with minds shaped by other cultures... It is only by being faithful participants in a supranational, multicultural family of churches that we
can find the resources to be at the same time faithful sustainers and cherishers of our respective cultures, and also faithful critics of them” (Newbigin 1989, 197).

More than 35 years ago, Lesslie Newbigin told us that we need “churches that are open to and rooted in all the cultures of humankind;” churches that correspond to the multi-ethnic neighbourhoods in which they serve as “an increasingly credible sign, instrument and foretaste of God’s reign over all nations and all things” (Newbigin 1995, 150).

Decades ago, Karl Barth told us, “The Church exists… to set up in the world a new sign which is radically dissimilar to the world’s own manner and which contradicts it in a way which is full of promise” (Hauerwas and Willimon 1989, 83).

It was a century ago that Robert Speer, in preparing for the 1910 World Missionary Congress in Edinburgh, argued that “humanity is so great and splendid a thing that its fullness can only be framed out of a world wealth of racial elements, bringing under the glorifying power of the gospel, into the abiding City of God, all those riches which no one race is great enough either to conceive or to attain” (World Missionary Conference 1910, 111). (For a discussion of changing language and understandings of “race” and “culture” in missionary writing see Brian Stanley [2010, 3-10].)

What is the potential, the promise, that we have as multicultural faith communities to be a credible new sign, something different—radically dissimilar—to the popular models of multiculturalism around us? Canada has seen very few of these communities of Jesus-followers where there is profound acceptance and adjustment, mutual critique and remodeling.

So, what aspects of multicultural social theory can help us as we seek to demonstrate a foretaste of this different reality?

How Can This Framework Help Us?

Making Sense of Confidence and Acceptance

A key thought in the Canadian government’s policy of multiculturalism is that national unity “must be founded on confidence in one’s own individual identity; out of this can grow respect for that of others and a willingness to share ideas, attitudes and assumptions” (Government of Canada 1971). This model is the basis for what is commonly called “integration;” where some degree of one’s original cultural identity is maintained, while also seeking to selectively adopt behaviors of, and participate fully in, the larger social network. Integration, however, can only be successfully pursued when the dominant society is open and inclusive (accepting) in its orientation towards cultural diversity (Berry 1984, 353; Ward 2003, 195-98).

I believe that Christian leaders in local congregations need to teach and model patterns of interaction with persons of cultures other than their own that demonstrate acceptance of the unique cultural identity of all persons in their faith communities.

It is this acceptance of cultural difference that allows individuals the psychological and spiritual “space” to examine those dimensions of their identity which need to be affirmed, restored or laid aside as they enter into a transformative relationship with God the Trinity. When cultural identity is not accepted in a Christian community—as a valued contribution to the whole—then individuals of cultures that are non-dominant in the congregation will identify a need to protect that identity from scrutiny. “If you won’t allow my Jamaican identity to factor into how we think and act as a Christian community, then how can I put that aspect of my life on
the table for the evaluation, healing, and restoration, that is required for my growth in Christlikeness?”

At this particular point in time there is fresh discussion about identity that is rooted in the experience of the 1.5 and 2nd generation immigrant, those young people living in the in-between world of multiple cultures—same, but different (Lin 2009). Alden Habacon, a Canadian who was born in Manila, says that, “using a new model for cultural identity, or “schema,” we envision individuals as dynamic identities that move through a complex web of cultures. These “cultural navigators” see themselves as the product of these networks, available to them through immigration, family roots, and residency in diverse cities all over the world” (Habacon 2007). We will do well to remember that cultural identity is fluid, adding depth and complexity to our work in this area.

*Making Sense of Multicultural and Intercultural*

In a multicultural society it is the state which should create a framework for appropriate interaction of cultures that recognizes both individual and collective rights; but it is at the level of person to person contact that intercultural dialogue and competence become a requirement.

I believe that Christian congregations need to intentionally embed values and develop policies that validate the worth of multi-cultures and their worldviews to the ongoing vision and development of the congregation. Likewise multicultural congregations will develop processes and practices that foster intercultural dialogue and understanding.

Values and policies in Christian communities are most often acquired via various theological frames which are rooted in biblical narratives and didactic passages. There is a need to examine afresh the content of Scripture to hear again the God of the universe address particularity from Genesis to Revelation. To hear that content in our own context, to let it speak to our uniquely Canadian worldview. Much of the current content available is examining these issues through the particular heritage, social structure and worldview of our American friends. In many cases the use of the word, “multicultural,” is anathema to them. Let’s not let them do our work for us.

In the field of intercultural relations, the contact-participation model speaks of the extent to which people value and seek out contact with those outside their own group, and wish to participate in the daily life of the wider, diverse, society (Berry 1998, 13). There is a direct connection between contact with other cultures and stress levels. Acculturative stress is a stress reaction in response to life events that are rooted in the experience of encountering cultural difference. When the range of choices includes separation, marginalization, assimilation or integration, there is a clear pattern of findings suggesting that integration is almost always the least stressful option (Berry 1998, 16).

It is quite possible that Christians are struggling with how to engage their “different” neighbours. Kymlicka suggested the differences may be “overwhelming”—our discipline talks about acculturative stress, or culture shock. It may be that part of our shalom, missional, contribution to our neighbourhoods is in helping Christians make sense of the differences by their active participation in an integrating faith community. Christian congregations can play a unique role in facilitating stress-relieving, healthy culture-contact (processes and practices) in a setting where participants share a foundational set of faith beliefs, experiences and practices.
Enabling Multicultural Common Spaces

In a recent analysis, researchers identified ten multicultural “common spaces” in the Canadian landscape; “spaces” like metropolitan areas, education centres, workplaces, family units, marketplaces, etc. Religious spaces are completely absent from their list, and the whole discussion; the assumption being that religious spaces may perpetuate separationist differences rather than ameliorate them (Dib and Turcotte 2008, 184).

These common spaces in Canada are defined “as locations in time and space where visible and religious minorities and other Canadians meet and interact; such spaces are the foundation for creating and enhancing a strong Canadian identity (Dib and Turcotte 2008, 162). These are the settings where new combinations of interaction emerge—synergies that are strong enough to lead to a collective national identity. This “common space” approach evokes an image of a town square where people mix in space and time and together produce a new, shared identity for themselves as a community (Dib and Turcotte 2008, 164).

I believe that Christian congregations need to intentionally develop and model patterns of hospitality that allow their physical and social environments to function as multicultural common spaces so that the welcoming of strangers begins to reshape all of us into a clearer picture of the image of God.

The Christian tradition speaks of alien and stranger as of particular significance to our kingdom identity. The Israelites were to offer hospitality to aliens and strangers, as a specific grace-act, to remind themselves of their own previous status, both as slaves in Egypt and captives in Babylon. This motif also encouraged Christians to hold their national (cultural) identity loosely, to remember that they were still sojourners, pilgrims on a journey to the Heavenly City.

In her work on Christian hospitality, Christine Pohl suggests that “hospitality depends on defined communities but, when practiced, presses those communities outward. There is an ever-present tension between maintaining a distinctive identity and welcoming strangers” (Pohl 2006, 97). Parker Palmer indicates that “the Holy City arises in the very process of strangers coming together and bringing the word of life to each other” (1983, 64).

Palmer suggests “the church could become a kind of halfway house between the comforts of private life and the challenges of diversity—but only if it can stay open to strangeness and help us to experience our differences within the context of a common faith” (1983, 28). Pohl emphasizes this caution as well: “when the practice of hospitality to strangers is sustained, fissures and weak spots in the welcoming community are often surfaced, and the presence of strangers becomes a ready explanation for what are in fact pre-existing problems” (2006, 97).

In order to do this work of developing multicultural common spaces, we will need to practice hospitality in ways that we may not have done in the past, we will need to acquire skill in facilitating intercultural dialogue, and we will need to be prepared for the “fissures” and dissonance (stress) that will surface because of the presence of difference.

Developing Interculturally Competent Leaders

These multicultural, “common-space” congregations do not emerge naturally. Our natural inclinations lead us to associate with those just like ourselves. This, in fact, is how culture develops and is sustained. Therefore, multicultural congregations with the kind of effective intercultural practices I am advocating will be intentionally led and facilitated by culturally-
competent leaders—leaders with acquired skills, not naturally occurring ones. There is a growing body of research and professional skills focused in this area of intercultural competence (Bennett 2004, 62-77; Gudykunst and Hammer 1984, 1-10), cultural intelligence (CQ; Early and Peterson 2004, 100-15; Livermore 2009), or global leadership (Caliguiri 2006, 219-28; Mendenhall et al. 2008; Lingenfelter 2008).

Global leaders are managers or executives who regularly function in complex, changing and ambiguous cultural environments. They work with, interact with, and supervise colleagues, clients and staff from cultures different from their own. Pastors of multi-ethnic congregations in cities like Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver or Moose Jaw, will need to become interculturally-competent global leaders to effectively oversee their churches. The classic pastoral training skill-set is not sufficient.

I believe that the skills and tools of the cross-cultural mission “community of practice” need to be more intentionally shared with denominational leaders responsible for engagement with multiple cultural perspectives and with pastors engaged in leading culturally diverse congregations.

Interculturally-competent pastors effectively employ an acquired portfolio of skills that includes adaptability, multiple perspective thinking, intercultural communication, culture-general and culture-specific knowledge, toleration of ambiguity, among other things. They will have acquired this skill set through experience with other cultures. But we should be clear that experience alone is not sufficient to develop competence (Kealey 2001). Experience with persons of other cultures requires reflection and generalized perspective adoption to make sense and produce the adjustment required to develop competence. Normally this will require a combination of formal education in related disciplines, facilitated intensive culture-immersion experiences, application-oriented adult professional development, and ongoing individualized mentoring relationships (Mendenhall 2006, 422-29; Hyatt et al. 2009, 119-20).

At the present moment there still appears to be a disconnection between the academic institutions and the real needs of pastors serving multi-ethnic congregations. I believe there are two dimensions to this disconnection; on one side is the disregard of pastors in multi-ethnic congregations for the conceptual and practical skill-set associated with developing intercultural competence, and on the other, is the perceived necessity of meeting academic “standards” to deliver appropriate learning opportunities. Many pastors of multi-ethnic congregations tend to minimize the differences as a pragmatic attempt to build unity and harmony.

In my practice of assessing pastors and ministry leaders of multi-ethnic congregations using the Intercultural Development Inventory, the majority desire to be “accepting” but just do not have the experience—and reflection on that experience—that is required to move beyond minimization. And it may be that non-formal, experiential learning is the key to passing on the skills of our discipline to our brothers and sisters serving such churches. Can we imagine inviting a pastor to accompany us for two weeks on our next international assignment? This kind of intentional learning and coaching opportunity may be the best thing we have to offer toward the development of an interculturally competent Christian leader.

Conclusion

If, as Kymlicka has indicated, we tend to like the “idea” of multiculturalism more than the reality of our Greek neighbour, and if we struggle with the stress of difference, then I would like to suggest that it should be the task of our Christian congregations to help us make sense of our
context—which will only continue to become more culturally diverse as we move further into this century.

It is the urgent need of the hour that Christian churches should become so released from their present dependence upon one set of cultural forms that [we] can provide the place wherein we are able to do theology in the only way that it can be done properly—by learning with increasing capacity to confess the one Lord Jesus Christ as alone having absolute authority and therefore recognize the relativity of all the cultural forms within which we try to say who he is. (Newbigin 1995, 159)

Our churches need to be released from Western, Euro-centric, cultural dominance—not because that is the multiculturally-correct, Canadian thing to do, but because our cultural dominance limits our vision of the God who has chosen to be incarnated in all cultures.

If all truth is God’s truth then we can affirm that there are aspects of multicultural social theory with which our discipline of the study of mission is very comfortable. The negative critiques are readily available to us, as well. Our challenge in the Canadian context is that we often hear either a simplistic, Pollyannish representation of multiculturalism, or strident criticism against it. In this presentation I have interacted with some of the more thoughtful formulators of this way of seeing human relationships.

We can learn from multicultural social theory about how recognition and acceptance of cultural identity adds worth and value to people who have been diminished by prejudice, discrimination and xenophobia. This is a shalom issue.

We can learn from multicultural social theory about the accepted meanings and associated usefulness of words and concepts like multicultural and intercultural. How the differences in meaning are not about “pc” subjective uses, but actually add complexity to our understanding of issues that are often simplistically reduced. These differences can help us imagine new policies and practices for our congregations.

We can learn from multicultural social theory that integration occurs in the presence of multicultural common spaces—safe spaces where interaction, inclusion, hospitality and integration can emerge. Can we re-imagine the physical and social spaces of Christian community as centres of welcome, hospitality and outward orientation?

We can learn from multicultural social theory that interculturally-competent leadership is necessary to the facilitation and emergence of hospitable, accepting and integrating communities. What fresh thinking and resources need to be directed toward the development of such leaders in our Christian communities?

“Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

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