A VISION OF CULTURAL FLOURISHING: REVELATION 7:9 AS AN ASPIRATIONAL VISION FOR SUPERDIVERSE AOTEAROA AND A CRITIQUE OF WHITENESS

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INTRODUCTION

Aotearoa is an increasingly diverse society, being labelled by Paul Spoonley as superdiverse.[1] Consequently, churches need to consider how they should react and adapt to this growing diversity. After emphasising Aotearoa's superdiversity, this paper argues that a reading of the vision of the innumerable multitude in Revelation 7 offers an image of the people of God gathered in multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-lingual unity around the throne of the Lamb. Such imagery is of a flourishing community. While this vision may often be embraced by churches as an aspiration, its realization is impeded by forces that may be unrecognized. This paper continues by arguing that in the current historical and cultural context of Aotearoa, whiteness –as a homogenising force that claims normativity– must first be addressed if the church is to flourish in the true multiculturality to which the vision invites us.

INCREASINGLY DIVERSE AOTEAROA – A DEMOGRAPHIC SHIFT

Aotearoa is a location that hosts a population with significant ethnic diversity. Its ethnic diversity warrants it to be described by sociologists – such as Paul Spoonley, who pulls the term from Steven Vertovec – as superdiverse. Spoonley uses superdiversity in relation to Aotearoa to articulate how it has "a population comprising groups from a wide range of origin countries and ethnicities."[2]

This shift in Aotearoa towards a superdiverse society is one that Spoonley locates as occurring in the 1990s. Spoonley and Richard Bedford helpfully narrate New Zealand's growth to superdiversity through three phases of immigration policies since the signing of Te Tiriti o Waitangi in 1840.[3] These phases are 1) New Zealand as a Britain-centric homogenous nation (1840s-1960s); 2) A period of shifting (1960s-1980s); and 3) New Zealand becoming superdiverse (1986-onward). What shaped this third stage was an immigration policy change. Spoonley and Bedford argue, "For the first time, this policy no longer reflected a privileging of 'white', specifically British immigrants… But the make-up of immigration flows confirmed

[1] Paul Spoonley and Richard Bedford, *Welcome to Our World?: Immigration and the Reshaping of New Zealand* (Auckland: Dunmore, 2012), 11; Paul Spoonley and Andrew Butcher, "Reporting Superdiversity: The Mass Media and Immigration in New Zealand," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 30:4 (2009): 355-372.
[2] Spoonley and Bedford, *Welcome to Our World?*, 11.
[3] Spoonley and Bedford, *Welcome to Our World?*, 27-52.

that the story of the New Zealand nation was now increasingly multicultural with significant geo-political and transnational connections to the Asia-Pacific region."[4] That is, since the 1980s, New Zealand began to draw migrants from "almost every country in the world, leading to greater ethnic diversity."[5]

This growth in superdiversity is particularly evident in Tāmaki Makaurau (Auckland), the location that Spoonley highlights specifically as a superdiverse city. When Auckland census statistics of ethnicity are compared from the census held in 1996 and 2018, this shift towards superdiversity can be seen (see Table 1 below). In 2009, Spoonley and Andrew Butcher predicted that by 2016 Auckland's population would be 25% Māori and Pacific residents, 25% Asian communities and 50% New Zealand Pākehā and immigrants of European descent.[6] As the 2018 census shows (See Table 1 below), this prediction has nearly come to fruition. The proportion of the population that identifies as descending from European ancestry is diminishing and the proportion of those identifying as Māori, Pacific, Asian and other ethnicities are increasing. Tāmaki Makaurau is clearly a superdiverse city; 41.6% of its population are born outside New Zealand (as of the 2018 Census).[7] Moreover, with a significant Pacific population, particularly in South Auckland, Auckland can claim to be the largest Polynesian city in the world.[8] StatsNZ claims that by 2043 (if not before) the largest grouping by ethnicity in Auckland will be Asian.[9] The numbers of ethnic demographic changes are less dramatic in other parts of Aotearoa, but the trends are constant.

Table 1. Auckland Ethnic Demographic, NZ Census[10]

Year	European	Māori	Pacific	Asian	Other
1996	63%	9.8%	12.9%	13.4%	0.9%
2018	53.5%	11.5%	15.5%	28.2%	3.4%

Considering Aotearoa has such a diverse population, how might the biblical narrative guide churches in living faithfully and flourishing in this superdiverse context? One beneficial location in the New

[4] Spoonley and Bedford, *Welcome to Our World?*, 52.
[5] Robert Didham and Richard Bedford, "Peopling the Future: Interpreting the Changing Demography of New Zealand," in *Tangata Tangata: The changing ethnic contours of New Zealand*, ed. Paul Spoonley, Cluny Macpherson and David Pearson (Southbank: Dunmore, 2004), 1-24. See also David Pearson, "Biculturalism and Multiculturalism in Comparative Perspective," in *Nga Take: Ethnic Relations and Racism in Aotearoa/New Zealand*, ed. Paul Spoonley, David Pearson and Cluny Macpherson (Palmerston North: Dunmore, 1991), 194-214.
[6] Spoonley and Butcher, "Reporting Superdiversity," 362.
[7] "Place Summaries | Auckland Region | Stats NZ," Stats NZ, https://www.stats.govt.nz/tools/2018-census-place-summaries/auckland-region.
[8] Damon Ieremia Salesa, *Island Time: New Zealand's Pacific Futures* (Wellington: Bridget William Books, 2017), 53.
[9] "Subnational ethnic population projections: 2018(base)-2043 | StatsNZ," Stats NZ, https://www.stats.govt.nz/information-releases/subnational-ethnic-population-projections-2018base2043#asian.
[10] Statistic gathered from "Auckland City (Census 96) (1996 Census of Population and Dwellings)," Stats NZ Store House, https://cdm20045.contentdm.oclc.org/digital/collection/p20045coll18/id/72/rec/20; "Place Summaries."

Testament that can inform churches in their attempts to flourish in a superdiverse society is the vision of Revelation, particularly the innumerable multitude that is seen in Revelation 7:9.

THE INNUMERABLE MULTITUDE – A VISION OF A MULTIETHNIC, MULTICULTURAL & MULTILINGUAL COMMUNITY

The depiction of the multitude in Revelation 7:9 is an important image for churches in multi-ethnic Aotearoa today as it depicts the people of God as a multi-ethnic, multicultural and multilingual people. As the innumerable multitude depicts the identity of Jesus/God followers, it is therefore often understood as a description of the Church. Michael J. Gorman emphasises its importance as he claims Revelation 7:9 is central to the Church's self-understanding.[11]

When engaging with the vision of Revelation 7, significant attention is often given to the presence of the fourfold formula (ἐκ παντὸς ἔθνους καὶ φυλῶν καὶ λαῶν καὶ γλωσσῶν - from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages) and the consequent possible allusions to threefold formulas located in Genesis 10 and Daniel. The author of Revelation[12] uses similar fourfold formulas seven times (5:9; 7:9; 10:11; 11:9; 13:7; 14:6; 17:15), which invites discussion around the apocalyptic numerical symbolism. In comparing these uses of the fourfold formula, the nouns in the fourfold statements vary, and the order of the four nouns is never the same.[13] Richard Bauckham argues that "Every detail of this formula's use and variation seems to be deliberately designed for a purpose."[14] Consequently, the nouns used in 7:9 are worth engaging with both independently and together as a formula.

While many commentators focus on the presence of the fourfold formula, there is often limited engagement with how the four nouns within the fourfold formula describe this community. Its use in Revelation 7:9 not only reinforces the vastness of the innumerable multitude but also depicts them visually via their ethnicity and audibly via their worshipping in their own γλῶσσα (*glossa*, language). That is, John

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[11] Michael J. Gorman, *Reading Revelation Responsibly: Uncivil Worship and Witness: Following the Lamb into the New Creation* (Eugene: Cascade, 2011), 133.

[12] The authorship of The Revelation of John is debated. Such debate is beyond the scope of this paper, and therefore I shall refer to the author as John.

[13] Ordering:
5:9) φυλῆς, γλώσσης, λαοῦ, ἔθνους
7:9) ἔθνους, φυλῶν, λαῶν, γλωσσῶν
10:11) λαοῖς, ἔθνεσιν, γλώσσαις, βασιλεῦσιν
11:9) λαῶν, φυλῶν, γλωσσῶν, ἐθνῶν
13:7) φυλὴν, λαὸν, γλῶσσαν, ἔθνος
14:6) ἔθνος, φυλὴν, γλῶσσαν, λαόν
17:15) λαοὶ, ὄχλοι, ἔθνη, γλῶσσαι
Richard Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy: Studies on the Book of Revelation* (London: Bloomsbury, 2000), 327.

[14] See Bauckham, *Climax of Prophecy*, 326-337.

can sensorally identify them as being from different tribes and heard in their different tongues. This text depicts a multi-ethnic, multicultural and – possibly the most overlooked aspect – a multilingual multitude.[15]

Interpreters commonly describe the fourfold formula as a collective thought, however they can omit the implications of each of the four terms used to describe the eschatological community. For example, G. K. Beale readily focuses on the Old Testament allusions in 7:9 but does not mention the presence of language in the fourfold formula.[16] Likewise, Brian K. Blount focuses on how the fourfold formula in 7:9 connects to God's faithfulness to Abraham but neglects to provide any engagement with the presence of language within it.[17]

The absence of focus on the multilingual component of this passage could be because the formula consists of the singular noun 'nation,' followed by three plural nouns. Grant R. Osborne suggests it is because "the singular 'every nation' is the primary emphasis, and the other three supplement it."[18] Through this understanding, γλωσσων could be utilised to emphasise or elaborate on how it is people from distinct and different nations – which their local languages clarifyingly delineate– are included in the multitude. This would explain why the multi-ethnic depiction is the most prevalent and focused-on aspect of this particular fourfold formula. For example, in light of 7:9, J. Daniel Hays states, "The ultimate people of God, as portrayed in Revelation, are multi-ethnic, in fulfilment of God's original intention."[19] Likewise, Stephen Pattemore notes how "the multi-ethnic people of God are the true fulfilment of the hope of Israel."[20] Thus, through the imagery of Revelation 7, the Church is understood as a multi-ethnic people, drawn from every nation. However, even with the noun 'nation' being the primary emphasis, it does not negate John's deliberate use of γλωσσων in every fourfold formula. Due to John's deliberate changing of terms included in the fourfold formula throughout the book, the presence of γλωσσων should receive more attention as it provides a nuanced difference when describing this multitude. Therefore, it is still worth reflecting on the implications of the presence of γλωσσων as part of the depiction of the multitude in 7:9.

John consistently, and I believe, crucially, depicts this multitude as a multilingual community. This aspect of the community is not disconnected from the multi-ethnic and multicultural nature of the images, as they are interwoven. Nevertheless, Revelation 7:9 can have much more significant implications when the multilingual depiction is taken seriously. Hays describes 7:9, saying, "around the throne of God one will find Nigerians, Cubans, Turks, Chinese, Brazilians, Swedes, Afghans, Mexicans, and a host of other peoples from hundreds of different tribes *speaking hundreds of different languages*" (emphasis added).[21] In this vision in

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[15] J. Daniel Hays, *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race*, NSBT (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 198-199.
[16] . G. K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 424-431.
[17] Brian K. Blount, *Revelation: A Commentary*, NTL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2009), 149-151.
[18] Grant R. Osborne, *Revelation*, BECNT (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 319.
[19] Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 199.
[20] Stephen Pattemore, *The People of God in the Apocalypse: Discourse, Structure and exegesis*, SNTSMS 128 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 142.
[21] Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 199.

Revelation, John hears the different nations singing in their own tongues. John records that the multitudes cry, "Salvation belongs to our God who is seated on the throne, and to the Lamb!" (Rev 7:10), but it is in their own tongue. Although the multitude is multilingual, Joseph L. Mangina notes, they still cry aloud together this praise, showing that there is an interweaving of unity and difference.[22] He concludes that ultimately "to find one's center in God is, paradoxically, to be freed to be uniquely and oddly one's self. Gathered around the divine throne, the tongues of all creatures are loosed to find their own peculiar parts in the cosmic song."[23] This rightly articulates how the passage portrays a multilingual multitude, as the people from every nation bring their own cultures and languages and use them to glorify God. Melba P. Maggay makes a similar observation, stating, "The praise offerings that welled up inside them were products of their cultures, sung in their tongues. While there was only one theme, we could imagine that the variations are infinite: the voices raised are of every conceivable rhythm and language."[24] Craig R. Koester makes a similar note of how "Maintaining one's language reinforced group identity."[25] Revelation 7:9, therefore, depicts cultural group identities as maintained through the presence of every tongue, and consequently, cultural identity is depicted as brought before the throne of God. The image depicts a multicultural and multilingual community. With John's ability to identify the multitude as being from every nation, alongside his use of γλῶσσα, the various cultures shown are coming together, but each is using their language and, therefore, aspects of their own culture before the throne.

Consequently, Revelation 7:9 depicts the people of God flourishing as a multi-ethnic, multicultural and multilingual community. Such a vision should be aspirational for churches trying to flourish in superdiverse Aotearoa today.

WHITENESS AS A HOMOGENISING FORCE IN AOTEAROA

When looking at Aotearoa's growth in ethnic diversity, whiteness can be located as impeding the journey towards superdiversity.[26] Spoonley describes the first phase of Aotearoa's immigration policies, the 1840s – 1960s, as when New Zealand had its status confirmed as a British colony, and therefore "immigration policies reflected the ambition of recreating a country that embodied what were seen as the virtues of Britain and of being British."[27] Spoonley locates this within the colonial project of settling Aotearoa and

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[22] Joseph L. Mangina, *Revelation*, Brazos Theological Commentary on the Bible (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2010), 113.
[23] Mangina, *Revelation*, 113.
[24] Melba Padilla Maggay, *Global Kingdom, Global People: Living Faithfully in a Multicultural World* (Carlisle: Langham Global Library, 2017), 122.
[25] Craig R. Koester, *Revelation: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Yale Bible 38A (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), 380.
[26] Before articulating Willie J. Jennings' theological definition of whiteness (which I subscribe to), this paper will first articulate how sociologists have noted that whiteness is present in Aotearoa today. However, this is a brief overview. For a more thorough articulation of whiteness's presence in Aotearoa, see Timote G. Naulivou, "'A great multitude': Reading the nations in Revelation in light of superdiversity and whiteness in Aotearoa" (MAppTheo thesis, Carey Graduate School, 2022), 64-80.
[27] Spoonley and Bedford, *Welcome to Our World?*, 51.

constructing New Zealand, noting how it echoed the assumptions of British states, privileging "whiteness' and equating 'Christian' with 'civilised.'"[28] However, though Spoonley locates it as something in Aotearoa's past, whiteness' ramifications still affect Aotearoa today. Claire F. Gray, for example, connects it to the legacy of colonisation in Aotearoa and argues that whiteness is practically invisible as it locates itself in a central position as the norm.[29] Furthermore, in representing itself as the "universal human norm," the relationship between whiteness, power and privilege can remain unseen and ignored.[30] Similarly, Ann Milne argues in education in New Zealand, the mainstream (which she labels as whitestream) is a space where white particularities are the norm.[31]

Christianity in Aotearoa also has historic entanglements with whiteness and the effect of its contemporary ramifications. Andrew Picard and Andrew Clark-Howard use the term *divinised whiteness* to describe the use of Christianity in New Zealand to provide divine sanctioning of white supremacy.[32] This can be observed through some of the missionary efforts in Aotearoa, such as the early missional premise that civilization should precede Christianity. For example, in Marsden's appeal to the Church Missionary Society to undertake work among Māori, he did not ask first for theologically trained clergy to teach the Christian faith but for "mechanics" who could teach "the Arts of Civilized Life."[33] Such historic entanglement with whiteness has contemporary ramifications. Some churches have acknowledged their role in historic confiscation of Māori land, and the consequences to the original land owners from whom it was taken.[34] Picard narrates a variety of racist stories, some from church experiences, that portray the contemporary reality of colonisation and then connects them to systemic whiteness.[35] Similarly, Clark-Howard notes of a diseased Christian racial intimacy, formed under whiteness in colonial history, present

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[28] Spoonley, "'I made a space for you," 40.
[29] Claire Frances Gray, "White Privilege: Exploring the (in)visibility of Pakeha whiteness (MA diss., University of Canterbury, 2012), 112. Also see Claire Gray, Nabila Jaber and Jim Anglem, "Pakeha Identity and Whiteness: What does it mean to be white?," *Sites: New Series* 10:2 (2013): 82-106; Helen Elers and Pooja Jayan, "'This is us': Free speech embedded in whiteness, racism and coloniality in Aotearoa, New Zealand," *First Amendment Studies* 54:2 (2020): 236-249; Naulivou, "'A great multitude,'" 64-80.
[30] Gray, "White Privilege," 68.
[31] Ann Milne, "Colouring in the white spaces: Reclaiming cultural identity in whitestream schools" (PhD diss., University of Waikato, 2013), 3-4.
[32] Andrew Picard and Andrew Clark-Howard, "The Christian settler imaginary: repentant remembrances of Christianity's entanglement with settler colonialism in Aotearoa New Zealand," *Practical Theology* 15:1-2 (2022): 78-91.
[33] Such claims are embedded with assumptions of white superiority. Eugene Stock, *The History of the Church Missionary Society: Its environment, its men and its work*. 3 vols. (London: Church Missionary Society, 1899), 1:205.
[34] See: Scott Yeoman, "Historic Anglican Church apologise takes place in Tauranga over land lost 151 years ago," *NZ Herald*, https://www.nzherald.co.nz/bay-of-plenty-times/news/historic-anglican-church-apology-takes-place-in-tauranga-over-land-lost-151-years-ago/5AYSMFWURBHTQWHY4SPIFIE5GQ/?fbclid=IwAR3FidEu4bdGaC2R1umXkTbmwnjW5Izu4T7r4GvHhf_e7UV6Dx3BoZspx0k ; D. Angelo Martin, "Tauranga's Curate Church giving $3m worth of real estate to local iwi says it's just the beginning of reconciliation," *NewsHub*, https://www.newshub.co.nz/home/new-zealand/2022/04/tauranga-s-curate-church-giving-3m-worth-of-real-estate-to-local-iwi-says-it-s-just-the-beginning-of-reconciliation.html
[35] Andrew Picard, "From Whiteness Towards Witness: Revelation and Repentance as Unbelonging to Empire" in *The Art of Forgiveness,* eds. Philip Halstead and Myk Habets (Lanham, Fortress Academic, 2018), 241-268, 247-248.

in his experiences of ministry and youth work in a Christian youth club.[36] Similarly, Picard and Jordyn Rapana trace Jordyn's experience as a wahine Māori in her studies at a theological college and note how the training was equipping her for ministry in Pākehā Baptist Churches, but not in Māori communities.[37] Throughout all of these texts, whiteness has and continues to influence Christianity and churches in Aotearoa.

From a theological perspective, Johnny Ramírez-Johnson and Love L. Sechrest define whiteness as a phenomenon "which orders global systems of dominance that favour Whites and that have in turn nurtured racism, white supremacy, and patriarchy."[38] Willie J. Jennings elaborates on such a definition, highlighting how, from the beginning of the colonialist movement, "being white placed one at the center of the symbolic and real reordering of space."[39] Building on Jennings' approach, Andrew T. Draper writes that the issue of whiteness is not European culture or "White things," but rather when these "said particularities have been elevated as universally normative and theologically central, all the while being cloaked in conceptions of neutrality."[40] It is in such claims of neutrality or norm that it functions as a homogenising force, drawing other ways of being in this world under its reach.

Therefore, from a theological perspective, whiteness–a homogenising force that claims normativity–obstructs churches' capacity to flourish as multicultural and multilingual communities. Or, as Christine Schmidt articulates, it is in the decentring of whiteness that one can step towards a multicultural world.[41]

WHITENESS THAT IMPEDES REVELATION 7:9'S VISION

When looking at Rev 7:9, there is not a singular normative culture or language. Instead, there is a multitude of languages, ethnicities and cultures gathered. It depicts the people of God as a multi-ethnic, multicultural and multilingual multitude. In this vision, John sees the nations' differences and hears them singing worship in their own languages. As Hays blatantly asserts: "This group is *not* a predominantly White congregation!"[42] The depiction is not of whiteness at the centre, nor the elevation of any particular culture, ethnicity, race, or language above the rest. Instead, there are many languages singing praises to God, none of which are in

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[36] Andrew Clark-Howard, "A theological exploration of race, pākehā identity, and reconciliation in conversation with Willie J. Jennings and Miroslav Volf" (PGDip diss. Carey Baptist College, 2020), 7.
[37] Andrew Picard and Jordyn Rapana, "'Let justice roll down': Confronting injustice in theological education for Māori flourishing," *Studies in Christian Ethics* (forthcoming).
[38] Johnny Ramírez-Johnson and Love L. Sechrest, "Introduction: Race and Missiology in Glocal Perspective," in *Can "White" People Be Saved?: Triangulating Race, Theology, and Mission*, eds. Love L. Sechrest, Johnny Ramírez-Johnson and Amos Yong (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2018), 1-24, 12.
[39] See Jennings articulation of the measurement of whiteness and salvific probability. Willie J. Jennings, *The Christian Imagination: Theology and the Origins of Race* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 35.
[40] Andrew T. Draper, "The End of 'Mission': Christian Witness and the Decentering of White Identity," in *Can "White" People Be Saved?: Triangulating Race, Theology, and Mission,* eds. Love L. Sechrest, Johnny Ramírez-Johnson and Amos Yong. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2018), 177-205, 181.
[41] Christine Schmidt, "Decentering Whiteness by Group," *Group* 42:4 (2018):311-329, 327.
[42] Hays, *From Every People and Nation*, 199.

the central position. What is central is the Throne of the Lamb which the worship surrounds. The great multitude reinforces that the only thing in the centre of the people of God is the Lamb itself, and consequently, anything else is idolatry. In light of this, it is beneficial that Draper theologically defines whiteness as a religious system of pagan idolatry, and therefore "As idolatry, whiteness must be dealt with like any such cultic system: its high places must be torn down and its altars laid low."[43] Anything that claims centrality in the people of God, other than God, is an idol that must be laid low. Similarly, Ramírez-Johnson and Sechrest state that whiteness is "an idolatrous way of being in the world at its core and thus activating a question that any reader needs to confront about the degree to which one's own praxis and worldview yearns for or participates in whiteness."[44] Therefore, whiteness as a way of being in the world that presents itself as a universal human norm becomes a form of idolatry that requires being brought to light, being seen, and as Picard observes, entails active resistance via truth-telling.[45]

Churches in Aotearoa must therefore assess whether they elevate certain particularities as universally normative in their communities. Soong-Chan Rah, when writing about how churches are to develop cultural intelligence, argues that some cultural forms of Christianity are falsely labelled as normative, such as styles of worship, theological priorities, and methods of evangelism.[46] He advocates for an awareness of what we elevate as normative. However, the necessity to recognise cultural forces is more than merely observing different forms of Christianity; it includes the ability to observe non-Christian frameworks that have been parasitically joined to Christianity. Jennings highlights concepts that have been parasitically grafted to Christianity, such as Western imperialism, whiteness, and the disconnection between humanity and creation.[47] Andrea Smith affirms this, arguing "We must decolonize our perceptions of Christianity by recognizing how Western imperialism shapes what we think the gospel is. In doing so, we save not only others with whom we wish to share the gospel, but we save ourselves as well."[48] Smith affirms the necessity of recognising how dominant culture privilege and whiteness form or affect one's perception of Christianity and how that has previously meant that sharing the gospel has been done by sharing whiteness alongside it.

In my experience in churches in Aotearoa, I have encountered whiteness through churches running like organisations/businesses and caring about their self-image rather than as a whānau who supports one another. I have seen whiteness in snarky comments after singing worship songs in te reo Māori, questioning why a church would do so and how awkward the pronunciation is. I have seen whiteness in the roles of young children in the church, and whether their spontaneous noises are seen as part of a community's

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[43] Draper, "The End of 'Mission'," 177-178.
[44] Ramírez-Johnson and Sechrest, "Introduction," 12-13.
[45] Picard, "From Whiteness Towards Witness," 260-261.
[46] Soong-Chan Rah, *Many Colors: Cultural Intelligence for a Changing Church* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2010), 124.
[47] Jennings, "Can White People Be Saved?," 27.
[48] Andrea Smith, "Decolonizing Salvation" in *Can "White" People Be Saved?: Triangulating Race, Theology, and Mission,* eds. Love L. Sechrest, Johnny Ramírez-Johnson and Amos Yong. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press Academic, 2018), 44-66, 66.

functioning or a problematic distraction. Consequently, recognising this provides the first step to not forcing other cultures to function through whiteness. Draper states, "it is only in the decentering of White identity that White particularities will be included in the body of Christ in a redemptive manner."[49] Stated another way, acknowledging the dominant culture in churches as a dominant culture can help to begin decentring it from the concept of norm, thus providing space both for other cultures to belong and for the dominant culture to be brought before God as a culture. [50]

CONCLUSION

In light of Aotearoa's superdiversity and ever-growing ethnic diversity, the innumerable multitude in Revelation 7:9 provides an aspirational vision for churches to pursue being multi-ethnic, multicultural and multilingual communities. However, in order to flourish in such diversity, churches need to assess how homogenising forces such as whiteness might inhibit such flourishing. Observing how whiteness may obstruct churches from flourishing as diverse communities provides the opportunity to decentre ways of being in the world that compromise the multi-ethnic, multicultural and multilingual nature of God's people.

[49] Draper, "The end of 'mission'," 181.
[50] For more detail on how this can look practically, see: Naulivou, "'A great multitude,'" 91-102.