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Book Review: Being the Church in a Multi-Ethnic Community: Why It Matters and How It Works by Gary L. McIntosh and Alan McMahan

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Medina: Book Review: Being the Church in a Multi-Ethnic Community: Why It will the church use? How does the church trust the results? However, it helps one to understand each role's function more precisely.

In chapter 10, the authors state that the missional church should be organic, reproducible, and self-sustaining (175). The term “organic” is an interesting word for the church. If the church is organic, when one team plants a church, the whole church should rejoice with them. When another team fails, the church should comfort and exhort them because it is not only their mission, but also the mission of the whole church. Similarly, one small group might fail to reproduce another small group. Then, it is not the failure of one group, but the whole church's because the church is one body that serves Christ, the head.

The authors suggest several keys for paradigm shifts in churches (192). Of the keys, “encouraging holy dissatisfaction” is not an easy one. Many leaders think they fail when they face opposition. Also, the authors quote Howard Snyder's mention of “nontraditional or nonordained leadership” to organize the revolution (204). These two relate to the flexibility of leadership. If leadership does not have flexibility, the church is set in the Christendom tradition.

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To summarize, Frost and Hirsch effectively present why and how churches should pursue the missional church model. Their strongest points in this book involve the three aspects of the missional church. Some parts look theoretical, but they give readers many implications. This book is a required book for a pastor who is preparing for church planting and also for a current leader of a church. Furthermore, if one church is too large to do something the authors say in this book, it needs to consider other options. Churches move and work dynamically. Many churches plant other churches in unchurched areas. The principles in this book can help churches plant other churches in a biblical way.

McIntosh, Gary and Alan McMahan. *Being the Church in a Multi-Ethnic Community: Why It Matters and How It Works*. Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2012. 219 pages. \$16.99.

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How can the Church be what Jesus Christ has called it to be in the ever-changing communities of North America? This is the question that Gary McIntosh and Alan McMahan set out to answer. These two authors have a wealth

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of experience that enables them to address this challenge. Gary McIntosh is a professor of Christian Ministry at Talbot School of Theology, and he is the president of Church Growth Network. Alan McMahan is a professor at Biola University where he teaches Intercultural Studies.

The purpose of this book can be summarized in this one sentence: “*Being the Church in a Multi-Ethnic Community* seeks to cover the basic missiological issues involved” (19). McIntosh and McMahan seek to help church leaders through the “enormous challenges, misunderstandings, and difficulties to overcome in the process to become increasingly diverse” (18). Little had been written from the perspective of the Church Growth Movement on the subject of multi-ethnic churches until these two authors wrote this book.

McIntosh and McMahan wrote *Being the Church* in such a way that readers can start from any chapter in the book and receive useful information. However, if one wishes, one could also read the book from start to finish and still find great continuity from chapter to chapter as each one builds on the other. “Each chapter analyzes a specific aspect of missiology, while synthesis comes together gradually throughout the book” (19).

These are the steps that McIntosh and McMahan use to reach their objective. First, they lay the foundation for the need for the book. Second, they define what it means to be a multi-ethnic church. Next, they examine the Scriptures to see both mono-ethnic and multi-ethnic church models and how the early church utilized both of them. Fourth, they look at how the world has been changing—that more people are living in urban centers than ever before. In the next chapter, they examine the trend of diversity in the United States and what churches have done to reach out to immigrants. Chapter six discusses different patterns found in multi-ethnic churches. These patterns deal with topics such as evangelism, worship, governance, conflict resolution, and discipleship. The next chapter is about mono-ethnic churches, the homogeneous unit principle, and what the Bible has to say about both. They relate this discussion with the purpose of the book and how one can understand this church growth principle in light of heterogeneous units that make up some of the multi-ethnic churches. Chapter eight examines the receptivity of first, second, and third-generation immigrants in the United States. The following chapter studies the patterns seen in urban churches, where most multi-ethnic churches appear. The last remaining chapters detail two different types of movements among multi-ethnic churches, the reconciliation and transitional movements, and then conclude with what one can learn from observing multi-ethnic churches.

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McIntosh and McMahan address an interesting point in regard to the Church

Growth Movement and one of its controversial principles. They discuss multi-ethnic churches in light of the homogeneous unit principle. For reference purposes, the Homogeneous Unit principle basically states “that people prefer not to cross cultural barriers in order to understand and accept the gospel” (88). Donald McGavran, articulator of this term, described it when he was discussing evangelism. Unfortunately, critics of this principle of the Church Growth Movement have misunderstood the principle to mean that all churches should exclude any type of minority.

McIntosh and McMahan do an outstanding job of addressing the misunderstanding of the Homogeneous Unit Principle by offering biblical support for the HUP and examining the biblical texts that detractors have used against this principle. Some of those passages that they mention are Acts 6, John 17, Matthew 10, and Ephesians 2 (111–116). They lay out concrete evidence for the biblical use of the HUP as a missiological strategy, but how does that mesh with multi-ethnic churches? How can a church have different ethnicities if it is only one homogeneous unit?

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Those are the questions that McIntosh and McMahan intensely address for most of the book. The following is a quick caveat to explain their stand on church structure. These two authors believe that both mono-ethnic churches and multi-ethnic churches are biblical. They give outstanding biblical evidence for both models. They explain throughout the pages of this book that a particular church model must be chosen based on the context of its surrounding culture.

As to the two questions mentioned above, McIntosh and McMahan give two key responses. First, as long as a mono-ethnic church is not exclusive, but rather inclusive, then it is a biblical model to be used to reach different ethnicities (89). They explain, “Large worship services are more likely to be multi-ethnic than small groups or Sunday school classes” (92). This means that churches can still utilize the HUP while branching out to be a multi-ethnic church (92-93). This idea should not seem foreign to evangelicals because many churches already utilize this type of model without even realizing it. Many evangelical churches separate their Bible study classes by age. They send visitors to the class that is appropriate to their age. They have a youth department, a children’s department, and so on all the way to the end of the spectrum. Why do these churches do that? It is because they know that people naturally worship with, fellowship with, minister to, and evangelize people who are in the same walk of life. After Bible study all the classes come

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together for a corporate time of worship. Those classes are homogeneous units in small groups which come together for a heterogeneous worship service. Now age and ethnicity are different to a degree, but when one makes separate small groups based on age, then one is using the Homogeneous Unit Principle the same way one would use the principle for a multi-ethnic church.

Second, McIntosh and McMahan explain that eventually the “Diversity becomes the homogeneity that bonds people together (a homogeneity of diversity)” (179). What they are saying is that when churches do strive and obtain multi-ethnic diversity, people seeking that type of atmosphere are drawn to such churches, and these churches become homogeneous churches in some sense. What bonds people together does not need to be race or ethnicity; rather, the bonding agent could be social status (college graduate or non-college graduates) or even a language (people who speak French may come from Canada and parts of Africa and yet bond together because of the heart language).

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McIntosh and McMahan have truly written an important work in an area that has been touched on very little by people with their viewpoint. They do this with professionalism and experience. They did not pick sides between mono-ethnic churches and multi-ethnic churches. They did not love one and despise the other. They praised both and demonstrated how both models can be used for the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.