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## Book Review: The Post-Racial Church: A Biblical Framework for Multiethnic Reconciliation by Kenneth A. Matthews and M. Sydney Park

Stephen G. Crouse

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Crouse: Book Review: *The Post-Racial Church: A Biblical Framework for Mul* statements have kernels of truth (i.e. the value of people, God’s enablement), but they smack of the language of human potential instead of our humanity “in Christ.”

It is a deep conviction of this reviewer that we cannot grasp our need for community outside of our union with Christ. This union with Christ (Rom 6:4–14) is an implication of the triune nature of God, which is community in its most glorious and redemptive form (John 5:18–24). This triune relationship was so important to Jesus that He prayed that it would imbue the communal lives of future believers (John 17:20–26). Gladen, in a quick paragraph, does mention the importance of understanding our identity in Christ but fails to teach us *how* to understand it. Understanding our union with Christ is not only our means of understanding community, but it also defines our goal of being in community—conformity to Christ (Col 1:28). Within the pages of LSGP an emphasis on this important and foundational doctrine is marginalized at best, absent at worst.

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Though struggling with redundancy and at times written in a disjointed fashion, *Leading Small Groups with Purpose* will be a welcome addition to many who desire a “nuts and bolts” treatment of small group leadership. It takes a variety of methods to cultivate and maintain a healthy culture within a small group, and for that Steve Gladen serves us well. Unfortunately, this book lacks a strong Christological focus and weighs too heavily on the scales of human behavior. The quality of Gladen’s work would have been stronger if he had emphasized more on the head (cognitive, theological) and heart (affective) of small group leadership. Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s *Life Together* and Jim Wilhoit’s *Spiritual Formation as if the Church Mattered* are two volumes that can easily supplement for the weaknesses found in *Leading Small Groups with Purpose*.

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Kenneth A. Matthews and M. Sydney Park, *The Post-Racial Church: A Biblical Framework for Multiethnic Reconciliation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2011, 280 pp., \$19.99.

Reviewed by Stephen G. Crouse, Vice President for Campus Ministries, North Greenville University, North Greenville, South Carolina.

Kenneth A. Matthews did his Ph.D. studies at the University of Michigan. He serves as professor of divinity at Beeson Divinity School where he teaches Old Testament studies and biblical interpretation. His previous publications include *The Paleo-Hebrew Leviticus Scroll, Genesis* (The New American Commentary), and *Leviticus: Holy God, Holy People*.

M. Sydney Park earned her Ph.D. at the University of Aberdeen. She serves as

assistant professor of divinity at Beeson Divinity School where she teaches New Testament studies and biblical interpretation. She is also the author of *Submission Within the Godhead and the Church in the Epistle to the Philippians*.

*The Post-Racial Church* was written to “better equip the church in answering why Christians claim that the gospel and the Christian church are the first and last best hope for peace in a racially diverse world” (13). The book’s primary task is to “provide a description of God’s saving activity for all humanity” (258). It is the authors’ intention not only to be descriptive but also prescriptive. The book is written from an evangelical perspective and as such acknowledges the challenges of addressing multiethnic issues in the evangelical church. The authors acknowledge that evangelicals struggle with the issue of racial reconciliation. While affirming the equality of all people, the worldview held by white evangelicals and the nature of their institutional organizations tends to produce segregation rather than integration. White evangelicals individualize race problems, ignoring the systemic problems of institutionalized racism. Since both white and black evangelical churches are highly segregated, they do not appear to be any better equipped than society in general to address racial inequality. It is not enough to be tolerant of other ethnicities. In order for the evangelical church to foster reconciliation, authentic integration is necessary.

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Yet the authors project a spirit of hope. They write, “The first step toward resolution is identifying the source of the problem” (26). Some argue that religious conservatives have been “woefully delinquent in striving for racial justice, if not outright responsible for its inequalities” (20). William Wilberforce, driven by his conversion to Christianity, led a life-long fight to end slavery in the British Empire. Christian ministers, such as Martin Luther King, Jr., led the way during the Civil Rights Movement. The authors write, “The gospel, by its very nature, calls for social engagement or it is not the full-orbed expression of the gospel of Jesus Christ” (22). The ministry of Jesus crossed ethnic barriers, and many of the churches of the New Testament were multiethnic. The authors note that the National Congregations Study observed an increase of majority white congregations that included ethnic minorities between 1998 and 2007. Believers who have been reconciled to Christ are called to a ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor 5:18). What better way is there to call an ethnically divided and segregated culture to unity than to worship together, crossing ethnic and cultural barriers?

The authors identify four critical issues for multiethnic churches that reappear throughout their work. These are (1) multiethnic worship; (2) evangelism and missions; (3) immigration; and (4) racial intermarriage. Multiethnic worship is defined in two ways: (1) it is a worship style that reflects ethnic diversity; and (2) it

**Crouse: Book Review: The Post-Racial Church: A Biblical Framework for Mul** refers to the ethnic composition of the worshippers. The authors build the case that God created all humans uniquely to bear His image. God blessed Abraham so that the nations would be blessed through his descendants. All believers from all the peoples of the world are called to be one body in Christ. The authors state, “We do not feel the need to press every church to be integrated, but we do strongly encourage each church to be ready to receive those of diverse ethnicity, and where possible to seek out people of different ethnic backgrounds” (263–64).

The nations have come to the United States. The call to fulfill the Great Commission (Matt 28:18–20) through missions and evangelism is not only a call to take the gospel to the nations, but it is also a call to share the gospel with the nations that have come to us. The authors call on believers to take the gospel to others who lack a Christian witness. Efforts to evangelize and disciple the nations among us may include ministering to the social, economic, educational, and physical needs of those we seek to reach.

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Immigration is a hotly debated issue in the United States. The authors make it clear that it is not their purpose to advocate policy or civil action, but rather to focus on the church’s call to be involved in the ministry of reconciliation. Believers are resident aliens in this life. The Scriptures make it clear that Christians are living in a world that is not their home. This truth should help believers relate to immigrants. Both the Old and New Testaments bear witness of God’s heart for displaced people.

In regard to racial intermarriage, many of God’s followers in the Bible married outside of their ethnic group. The authors state that “Israel’s identity as the people of God is not characterized by racial purity but by covenant faithfulness and exclusive worship of Yahweh” (262). They reference Abraham’s descent from the Amorites, Joseph’s marriage to an Egyptian, and Moses’ Midianite wife as examples of the multiethnic nature of the Hebrews. Matthew’s genealogy of Jesus contains several Gentile women, including the Canaanite Rahab; Ruth, a Moabite; and Bathsheba, a Hittite by marriage. The authors argue, “The inclusion of Gentiles in Jesus Christ’s lineage foreshadows the universal significance of the salvation Jesus Christ provides to all humanity. . . . Christians are not united by ethnic blood, but by the blood of Christ.” (263).

Matthews and Park have written a timely book on the issue of ethnic reconciliation from a decidedly evangelical perspective. After reading the title of the book, one of my friends asked, “Do you really believe such a church exists?” Some may take the title to mean that the church has moved beyond the issues of race and ethnicity, which is far from the case. However, the subtitle addresses the

book's intention to provide "a biblical framework for multiethnic reconciliation." The authors build a strong biblical case for the need of multiethnic churches, particularly in a nation that is growing increasingly diverse. With projections that there will be no majority race in the United States within forty years, multiethnic congregations will likely grow in number, prominence, and impact in the years to come.

The book is balanced in its approach to the Scriptures with the first four chapters focusing on the Old Testament and the last four chapters focusing on the New Testament. This provided the best use of the writing team since Matthews' expertise lies in the Old Testament and Park in the New Testament. Matthews wrote the introduction and the first four chapters, which focus on Old Testament texts, and Park authored the last four chapters, which deal with the New Testament, and the conclusion. While the work maintains its cohesiveness, it would have been strengthened by corroboration throughout the work. Matthews is a Caucasian whose life experiences reflect growing up as a member of the majority ethnic group. Park is a Korean immigrant who came to the United States with her family when she was eight years old. Park included her story of dealing with racism as a Korean immigrant in the book's conclusion. Her personal testimony from her life experiences adds a greater understanding of being a minority in American society. Her story is especially helpful for those who are of the majority race.

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The four reoccurring themes of multiethnic worship, evangelism and missions, immigration, and racial intermarriage are certainly critical issues for multiethnic churches and needed to be addressed. However, the issue of leadership was omitted. While every author has to deal with the limitations of space, a section on multiethnic leadership referring to examples in the Scriptures, such as Jethro's influence on Moses' leadership model for the Hebrews (Ex 18:13–27) and the multiethnic makeup of the leadership at the Antioch church (Acts 11:26), would have been helpful.

Each chapter, including the introduction and conclusion, ends with excellent, thought-provoking questions designed to engage the reader with the content and to encourage reflective thought and actions that can lead individuals and churches toward reconciliation and transformation in Christ. The questions also provide a useful framework for group interaction and discussion on the issues covered in the work. Any church would benefit from a group study of the book, but it would be especially advantageous to churches that are open to greater ethnic diversity. Matthews and Park have provided an excellent resource, addressing the important issues of race and ethnicity in the body of Christ.