

BOOK REVIEWS

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Kwiyani, Harvey C. *Multicultural Kingdom: Ethnic Diversity, Mission and the Church*. Golden Lake, London: SCM Press, 2020. Pp. 256, Paperback \$24.61, Kindle \$23.38.

Harvey C. Kwiyani is a lecturer in African Christianity and Theology at Liverpool Hope University. Originally from Malawi, he has lived in Europe and North America for many years, working both as an academic (teaching theology, missions, and leadership). In this book, he is presenting a relevant assessment of the current situation of the church. This book contributes to the current debate in ecclesiology from the perspective of social science. In this book, Harvey provides the historical overview of the development of the church’s idea for the last couple of hundred years that led us to the concept of a multicultural church. Harvey analyzes the emerging process of the multicultural church in Britain as a reflection of the worldwide church’s diversity.

For example, in chapters one and two, Kwiyani discusses the failure of western Christianity in the past to understand the idea of the kingdom of God for all kindred and tongue. He specifically uses the experience of the churches in the United Kingdom as an example of the development of the multicultural church as a worldwide phenomena. For him, the kingdom of God is like a mosaic where people contribute something to bring more color and to create beauty in the group. He says that “the Spirit is the glue” (p. 4)

in the church, and does not mention much about any other means. He believes that the kingdom of nations and languages mean all nations, and languages may bring their flavor of culture to the kingdom of God.

For Kwiyani, diversity is a gift. It is part of God's plan for His people to be able to demonstrate unselfish love. Throughout the book, he emphasizes the idea of multiple images of Christianity. He argues that there is no one image of Christianity that is representable enough to be taken as the only Christian identity. He repeats the idea of diversity as a gift in the book. For example, in chapter two, he discusses how in the past, the western countries tried to evangelize the world, but today the world evangelizes them (UK, Europe, Australia) back. They created a universal image of Christianity in the past but it is not commended anymore today.

He discusses how the multicultural church has become a new normal in the UK and elsewhere. He believes that past Western Christians probably never anticipated this new reality. He argues that in doing mission, the Western Christians in the nineteenth and until the early twentieth centuries seemed to assume that the idea of church is similar to the idea of colonialism. He points out how mission and colonialism were seen as "two side of the same coin" (p. 28) for most people in the world at that time. He describes well how global culture exposure has changed Christianity from a Western Christianity to a multicultural church. In the past Western missionaries tended to conform all the local cultures of the new believers to their cultures and made Western Christianity a standard for Christianity wherever they went. However, he believes that the all nations-Christianity is the new "typical image" (p. 31) for Christianity today, that every country has its typical church, even typical sub-cultures within the country, with their own uniqueness.

Furthermore, he discusses how William Carey brought the idea of contextualization. It was strange at that time since "less than 10% of world Christians lived outside the West" (p. 19). However, today, it has become very much relevant and important for the church's mission. The Jews who spread the gospel to the world did not imagine that they would become a minority among those who had accepted Christianity. In a similar way, the Western countries that sent missionaries to spread the gospel in Asia and Africa in the past, now have becoming more pagan. Christianity, once a Jewish sect, first became a Western religion, and then the religion of the whole world. Kwiyani argues that this fact should be enough to urge the church today to evaluate its role in society.

Kwiyani presents in chapter two an irony in Christianity that we should try to avoid in the future. He states that in the World Missionary Conference in 1910 with 1215 delegates, only 18 came from Asia and none from Black Africans. The delegations were optimistic that it was possible to evangelize the whole world in their generation. Far removed from such optimism, Christian countries were at that time involved in WWI and WWII instead. On the contrary, African rejection of missionaries as colonial in 1960 had grown from 20 to more than 70 % of the Christian population, to around 630 million. It is far from what Western Christians feared in the past, namely that “Africa would continue to convert to Islam” (p. 25).

In chapter three, Kwiyani discusses the characteristic of the multicultural church that is emerging nowadays. He also points out how some Christian misinterpret the Bible to support the idea of racial division. This theological misunderstanding has made Christians in the past force conformity to the church. He then presents the transition of the mission orientation in chapter four. He argues that in the multicultural kingdom of God, the mission is from everywhere to everywhere. He claims that even though historically speaking the mission started from Europe, the day when Western missionaries thrive have just ended, not because there are no more Western missionaries, but because of the world Christianity is emerging in. Global migration and the fall of colonialism also contribute to the world church mission efforts.

In chapter five, Harvey discusses the multicultural reality in connection with the fast growth of globalization and migration. He discusses mono-cultural myth. He argues that the world is already diverse and multicultural for the last two thousand years. He is criticizing the reasons for the existence of mono-cultural churches. For instance, most first-generation migrants find that mastering a new language is quite difficult, especially among older people. When this happens, they need a church that provides worship service in a language they can understand, and this will naturally be in a mono-cultural church. Another theory among church planters on church growth is that churches grow faster if they are mono-cultural. Church planters are encouraged to find their niche—people of similar cultural characteristics as themselves—if their church plant is to grow fast because people like to attend churches where they do not need to overcome cross-culture barriers.

Whatever reason for the mono-cultural church, for him, it needs to be evaluated. In chapter six, for example, Harvey argues that to ignore cultural diversity means to isolate one’s own self from the reality. He argues that experiencing and celebrating diversity is a gift from God, because we can have a foretaste of heaven and have the opportunity to use a “penknife” (p.

76) of wisdom that comes from people we thought strangers for personal benefit. He argues that "the kingdom of God finds its fullest expression in the intercultural mutuality" (p. 77). In chapter seven, he also argues that multicultural churches are the Gospel Imperative.

Probably the importance of chapter nine is to answer questions such as: Why do we prefer to remain segregated in our ecclesiology? Why do several churches of different ethnic heritage use the same building for Sunday services but not worship together? Why has ethnic diversity in Christianity sometimes led Christians to a mono-cultural perspective on churches? Kwiyani believes that the mono-cultural churches go against everything that we see in the New Testament. For him, Christianity emerged in a multicultural context and stays connected to the local culture. He believes that there is "no such thing as a culture-free ecclesiology" (p. 124). In the last chapter of his book, Harvey compares the idea of mono-cultural church and multicultural church. He presents conditions that allow the mono-cultural church and discusses how the mono-cultural church has hindered the mission in the multicultural world. He concludes that multicultural church is the answer for doing mission in the multicultural world.

The key idea for Kwiyani in this book is that the kingdom of God is multicultural, and therefore, the church is supposed to be multicultural. This understanding will affect the way denominations in the church do their mission. This book is a good reminder for the church leaders today, as well as students that will be future leaders of the church, in that we have to give serious consideration to the issue of pluralistic and multicultural aspect in the church. Even though his approach in this book is socio-anthropological and missional, Kwiyani tries to provide some biblical examples to justify his argument. It guides the readers to see the theological background for his apology.

However, Kwiyani seems to not clearly discuss the issue of unity in the multicultural setting. It is not clear how Christians maintain their universal identity as a worldwide kingdom at the same time as preserving their unique local identity as part of the local culture. It seems that for Kwiyani, it is the culture that shape the church not the other way around. His recommendation to this issue is more on the socio-anthropological explanation rather than the biblical one. The Holy Spirit seems to be the only unifying element mentioned as a glue among individuals or groups in Christianity. When he discusses the issue of power in relation to the unity, he keeps on proposing socio-anthropological solutions for it. Readers cannot expect a profound biblical-theological exposition for this issue and most of his argument in this book.

Kwiyani contributes in bringing awareness to the importance of contextualization and appreciation of cultures in the church. On the other hand, he sees that the universal Christian identity clashes with the multicultural world, and therefore proposes the acceptance of a multicultural image of Christianity rather than having a shared global identity. Subsequently, he seems to have no solution to how people with different cultural backgrounds can be united. He neither engages much with the different kinds of situations in the different denominations. He tends to present a limited example from a particular Christian denomination. Nevertheless, this great book will be an eye-opener to those who want to deal with ecclesiology and church missions.

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