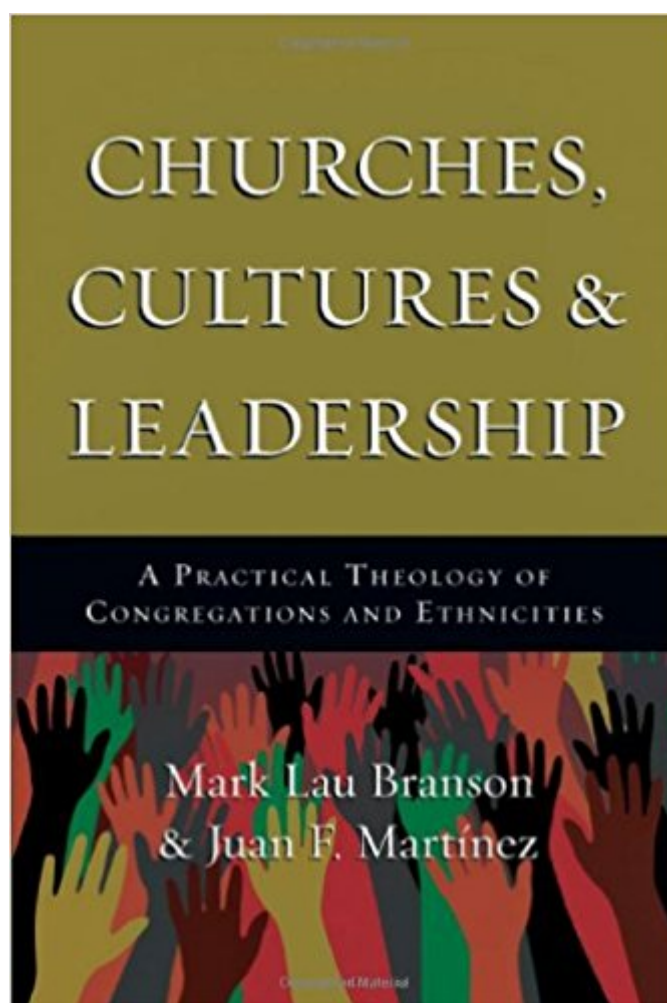


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Churches, Cultures And Leadership: A Practical Theology Of Congregations And Ethnicities



Synopsis

As the church continues to hear and heed Christ's call to reflect the multiethnic character of his people, pastors and lay leaders need to gain skills and competencies to serve in those contexts. The multicultural team of Juan Martinez and Mark Branson has written this book to equip such leaders to create environments that make God's reconciling initiatives apparent in church life and in our missional engagement with neighborhoods and cities. Generated by courses they teach at Fuller Theological Seminary, Branson and Martinez take an interdisciplinary approach that integrates biblical and theological study with the disciplines of sociology, cultural anthropology and communications. The result is a rich blend of astute analysis with guidance for practical implementation of a deeper intercultural life for the church. Case studies, Bible studies and exercises for personal reflection and classroom use connect the real life and everyday challenges that inevitably arise in multi-ethnic contexts. Martinez and Branson offer not static model but a praxis of "paying attention," reflection and study that can lead to a genuine reconciliation and shared life empowered by the gospel that is personal, interpersonal, cultural and structural.

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Customer Reviews

"This particular book is loaded with integrated wisdom and insight regarding dealing and understanding race, cultures, and intercultural relations within the body of Chris. This book is a must read by anyone engaging in a multicultural setting." (Joy St. Fort, Africanus Journal, April 2013)"As the American population continues to ring itself around metropolitan areas--with all of their growing

diversity-- , this book could become a welcome and most useful church resource, for many years to come." (George B. Thompson, Jr., *Congregations*, Volume 2 2011)"Branson and Martinez take an interdisciplinary approach that integrates biblical and theological study with the disciplines of sociology, cultural anthropology and communications. The result is a rich blend of astute analysis with guidance for practical implementation of a deeper intercultural life for the church. Based on years of experience, highly engaging, greatly needed, *Churches, Cultures and Leadership* will benefit professors, students and church leaders. It may also be of interest to others working in diversity education." (www.sirreadalot.org, June 2011)"This book provoked my mind theologically, historically, practically and spiritually. Branson and MartÃnÃ- nez do a masterful job in communicating the complexities that conjoin church, cultures and leadership." (Dr. David A. Anderson, senior pastor, radio host, and author of *Gracism*)"A book on the intercultural formation of congregations that integrates theology and cultural anthropology. This book is not a 'how to' but a humble and profoundly informative presentation that facilitates coming to the transparency needed for moving toward intercultural relations and ministry. Culture, language, worldview, theology and the unconscious assumptions that shape these are defined and examined so that we can understand our habits of ethnicity, class and social status. Awareness exercises are provided for facilitating conversations and the doing of theology. Leadership issues are then discussed in light of all of these aspects. The vignettes provided keep it real, and resources are provided with every chapter for further reading and viewing (movies). Finally, a book that's 'real' about these complex matters. Read it, share it and you will be ushered into lasting change." (Dr. Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, pastor, religious educator and dean of Esperanza College of Eastern University)"Given the phenomenal demographic changes in our nation (e.g., cultural diversity of our communities and congregations), *Churches, Cultures and Leadership* is a very important and rich resource for engaging the multicultural challenges facing the church. Via an interdisciplinary approach (i.e., Scripture, practical theology, social anthropology, cultural studies, philosophical hermeneutics, leadership theory and communication) Branson and MartÃnÃ- nez have gifted the church with an unique--the only one of its kind--work for practical and faithful intercultural life and for helping the church reflect the diversity of America." (Rev. Eldin Villafane, Ph.D., professor, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, and author of *Beyond Cheap Grace*)"Part biblical study, part handbook on ministry, for use in the classroom or in small groups, *Churches, Cultures and Leadership* is a foundational text that meets the need for a broad, interdisciplinary and substantive perspective on intercultural ministry. From years of experience, Mark Lau Branson and Juan MartÃnÃ- nez offer unique insights and a range of practical resources. May it help us toward a church in the power of

the Spirit!" (Mark R. Gornik and Maria Liu Wong, City Seminary of New York)"Branson and MartÃ­nez discuss the issues of culture and ethnicity in the life of the church, and of leadership within the context of these issues, in a more thorough and yet more accessible and practical way than any other book I know. This is a must-read book for any who are really concerned for the mission of the church in the future that now opens before us." (Justo L. Gonzalez, author of *The Story of Christianity*)"If I were teaching today, this would be my basic and required text. If I were a pastor, this would be my chief source for leading my congregation into the future. Since I am a congregant, I will read this to better understand how to function in a changing urban society. This is a timely offering, crafted out of field experience, classroom disciplines and deep personal commitments. Great stuff!" (William Pannell, Fuller Theological Seminary)"Churches, Cultures & Leadership is one of the most significant books on the work of racial and cultural reconciliation yet published. Branson and MartÃ­nez have written a comprehensive work that integrates biblical research and social science analysis with highly practical suggestions for application in congregations and communities facing intercultural realities. They make the complexities of diversity understandable, accessible and even exciting. This thoughtful, engaging and substantive book by two practitioner scholars is a must-read for anyone interested in creating intercultural community." (Curtiss Paul DeYoung, professor of reconciliation studies, Bethel University)

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Church. Cultures. Leadership. Each a substantial field of study in itself, they are brought together by Branson and Martinez in this text to uncover a wealth of insights. Theological explorations are melded with a social science overview in the effort "to help men and women in our churches to see differently and to gain the skills and competencies needed for multicultural contexts" (13). The authors lay down a substantial challenge to church leaders, calling us to consider what the call of the gospel is for the Body of Christ that has been long

fractured along ethnic, cultural and socioeconomic lines. Reconciliation, while theoretically straightforward, must be approached with regard to the incredible complexity of human society. Branson and Martinez present a healthy blend of intellectual rigor and spiritual fervency as essential components for successfully pursuing this goal. While they expose the need for and historical dearth of intercultural competency among Christian leaders, they repeatedly emphasize that “without God’s initiatives that transform us personally and as groups, our behaviors tend to be limited by cultural and human habits” (17). At points the book feels rushed to cover the remarkable breadth of subject matter, however they appear aware of their limitations and do well to integrate suggested resources for further deeper inquiry. The practical theology cycle, church formation components and leadership triad provide an effective core for thoughtful, empowering, culturally sensitive leadership. The authors have provided us “majority-culture evangelicals [who] do not have the proper tools to understand the dynamic of race relations in the United States” (232) with a wealth of insight and resources. More than anything, they rightfully call for consciousness among privileged folks like myself who can too easily plow forward with our agendas without ever reflecting on how our cultural autobiographies shape everything we do. Martinez and Branson’s text is a springboard for thoughtful pursuit of holistic transformation. I highly recommend it.

Overall, Branson and Martinez’s work is an excellent book for church leadership to read and reflect on with regard to their church’s structure, organizational culture, and its place in society. It is helpful as a resource that covers a breadth of challenges that multi-ethnic churches may face. However, it is not meant to be a guide for one’s personal growth in cultural intelligence. It does not provide step-by-step tips for how to communicate with a particular culture, guide to navigating nonverbals, and other features one finds in books on this subject. Thus, the book is a great read for church leadership and theorists, or perhaps students studying ecclesiology, but not so much for the lay congregant. The book’s focus on ecclesiology is evident in its robust and poignant chapters on the theology of multi-ethnicity. It has a self-proclaimed focus “on churches in the United States and how we can be faithful to God’s call on our churches to promote more attentiveness, wisdom and faithfulness concerning intercultural life in and among churches” (12/3). Throughout the book, the authors ask questions regarding the “church’s identity and agency” (63/3), the context that the church is in geographically and socially (74/3), and the integration of multicultural questions

throughout the exploration. The book spends about half its time defining various cultural aspects that come into play in churches, such as worldviews, languages, social relationships, individuality, and perception. However, even in these, the authors focus primarily on how cultural aspects affect the church. For example, in discussing language, the authors address the “tension among people who are bilingual and ask “theological questions about the role of language in the church’s mission” (129/2). It is in this developing theology of praxis and theology that the book’s primary strengths lie. The book also holds great value for church leaders in particular. It devotes several chapters to specific practices for leading and initiating change in congregations. Again, the focus is less on personal change and more on how to instigate change in a church as a whole. The authors discuss some key forms of leadership (relational, interpretive, and implemental) with a specific focus on instigating “adaptive change” in an organization (225/2). Ultimately, they propose a “cultural tool kit” that provides “multiple strategies to effectively analyze and interpret intercultural relations” (232/2). The book does not deny the importance of the individual’s cultural intelligence, but it certainly de-emphasizes it. The authors identify “spiritual formation” as one of the three components of church formation (62/2). However, the purpose of spiritual formation is the formation of the church. Moreover, multiple elements in the book, such as methods on “leading adaptive change,” presumes that those who are being led have already engaged in some sort of inter-cultural experience and are sensitive to it. The book lacks in a discussion on how to lead congregations that are altogether uninterested in or even opposed to multi-ethnic ministry. In short, I would ultimately recommend this book to church leaders who are faced with a situation of desiring or recognizing the need for multi-ethnic change and development, but lack the know-how and practical theology to do so.

Perfect exactly as expected !!!

Recommended by my professor and I like it. It's a hands on in a practical way.

Great read for leaders desiring multi-ethnic, multicultural groups.

Much effort went into constructing this book. Branson & Martinez seek to address cultural diversity

in the context of local churches. They address differences, theories of differences, and theorize how those specific differences have come about. They take this one step further and provide practical steps forward with real life examples/illustrations presenting their teaching point. The reading is overly psychological at times, and overly "evangelical" at others. All in all, though, there truly needs to be more attention paid to books focusing on addressing cultural diversity in the local church context. Too often we settle for homogeneous viewpoint, portrayal, and theology.

An outstanding book with insights about culture and practical theology and also helps in understanding your congregation and the people that you working with.

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