

Multicultural Ministry. Finding Your Church's Unique Rhythm. David A. Anderson. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2004.

This is a useful book with some helpful insights, though its orientation is decidedly American. Racial reconciliation between whites and blacks pervades the entire book and, indeed, the Racial Reconciliation Continuum (97ff) and the series of practical helps supplied in the book's appendices all express a particularly American concern with racial reconciliation between whites and blacks. This reduces the applicability and relevance of this book to the development of multicultural ministry in the Australian context. Notwithstanding, as the summary below indicates, there are some perspectives and observations that are worthy of note and further reflection.

About the Author

David Anderson is a former intern of Willow Creek and now pastors Bridgeway Community Church, a non-denominational multicultural church in Columbia, Maryland.

Anderson views many US churches as “simply one section of an orchestra”, with the sections “representing races and cultures that have distinct and separate qualities of sound” (13). The purpose of this book is “to paint a picture and give practical insights on how to bring the sections of God’s orchestra together so that the world can hear a sound unlike they have ever heard before” (14).

Part 1. The Social Swing

Anderson begins by recalling his childhood experiences which taught him “that being black in America was a liability, not an asset” (18). His memories of junior high school were of blacks and whites being at opposite ends of the spectrum. He views black and whites as “the bookends of the racial debate in America”, it being the function of bookends to provide the necessary tension to keep upright the books in the middle, that is, the other races and ethnic groups in North American culture: “If the books on the ends move closer, all of the books will come together” (19). Further, “the entire shelf of books has knowledge and perspectives to offer the attentive reader” (20). Anderson imagines all the books “bound into one massive almanac of rich knowledge and multicultural expression” (20).

Anderson compares ministry with dancing: “The powerful movement of the Holy Spirit provides a sense of inner music as we dance on the floor of multicultural ministry” (28). He looks at “the dance floor of ministry”, observing, “The multicultural trends are compelling us all to ‘shake a leg’ toward a more melodious ministry” (28). Anderson then briefly describes seven churches and some parachurch organizations “that are practicing the dance of multicultural ministry” (28): Ambassador Bible Church, Vienna, Virginia (90% Asian, mostly mixed between Koreans and Chinese); Antioch Bible Church, Seattle (over 3,000 attenders); Bridgeway Community Church, Columbia, Maryland (55-60% African-American, 13% Asian, Latino or other ethnicities and 27-30% Caucasian); Mosaic (Southern Baptist Church), Los Angeles (1,500 attenders: 40% Asian-American, 30% Latino, 30% Caucasian and other groups); New Providence Community Church, New Providence, Bahamas (500 attenders); Redeemer Presbyterian Church, Manhattan, New York; Willow Creek Community Church; BridgeLeader Network (established by Bridgeway); CCCU (The Council for Christian

Colleges and Universities); Practical Bible College, Birmingham, New York; and Salem Broadcasting.

Anderson believes the “dance floor is filling up with churches and organizations that are either starting out as multicultural ministries or are transitioning in that direction” (37).

Anderson sees unicultural churches facing a major multicultural challenge as the nations swings toward a more ethnically diverse society. Given such changes if a church’s vision for ministry doesn’t include cultural diversity then its vision is not 20/20: “It may be 1980s, 1990s, or even 2005, but it is not 2020” (40).

Anderson grounds his appeal for racial reconciliation in the biblical doctrine of reconciliation in Christ. However, if people in our churches are going to “feel at home enough to groove, we need a rhythm of cooperation, power sharing, and idea generation” (42). Anderson confesses that he found it hard to “groove” with the white churches he had been a part of because of the way biblical theology was indiscriminately mixed with right-wing politics. For example, when he hears white Christian radio hosts and white evangelical publications emphatically stating that America needs to return to the values and morals of its Christian past, then Anderson finds himself asking what time in the past that would be for black people: “The time when my people were locked in the chains of slavery? The time when my people were under the oppression of segregation? Or the time of struggle for equality during the civil rights movement?” (43). Given this, Anderson would rather look to the future.

On the other hand, Anderson concedes that it is also difficult for a white member to feel at home in a black church that preaches black empowerment and political favouritism.

Anderson relates the example of an African-American pastor who consulted him because so many whites were coming to his church and he was at a loss to know how to respond. In fact he had been preaching more afrocentrically to drive them away. However, these whites had deliberately come to this church having been convicted that it was wrong to remain separate. But the pastor was afraid the whites would take over and also bring into his church “their white, conservative, right-wing evangelicalism” (46). Anderson observes that this pastor prejudged the motives of the whites based on his view of politics and evangelicalism. Anderson convened a meeting involving the pastor, his new white, female assistant pastor and a small group of the white visitors, with reconciliation and true union being effected (the whites had dual membership).

However, Anderson acknowledges that “churches will not have a multicultural groove if reconciliation remains a biracial issue” (48).

Part 2. The Relational Rock

Anderson compares relationships with dancing: “Relating to other people often brings together opposites who complement each other” (51), such as Anderson’s own relationship with Rich Becker. He sees the church as being a place which should provide a safe place for a variety of dances, though people need to find their own rhythm of relating. This involves learning to be a safe person with whom others can

raise difficult and penetrating questions concerning the perceived problems associated with one's own culture. A safe person is a good listener, able to limit the use of loaded words (e.g. the words *racism* and *racist*), and having loving arms.

Anderson recognizes the awkwardness of intercultural relations, e.g. not knowing what the right kind of introductory question might be. We might want to know what a person's nationality or ethnic background is and yet we don't know if we will be treading on toes if we ask such a question straight out. The question, "Where are you from?" might not get us far.

Also some have feel they have only had their hands slapped when they have made efforts to relate cross-culturally. Anderson compares the feelings of many African-Americans in the US with the wife in a counseling situation who has been giving her husband chance after chance for over 13 years, observing that "most men don't call for counseling until its virtually too late"). Similarly, African-Americans are "sick and tired of discussing and debating the same issues again and again. Many have given up and have given in to their frustrations and anger" (69). Reconciliation can only begin when there has been a clear demonstration of sincerity from each party.

Anderson recognizes that in the US the tension between blacks and whites adversely affects other ethnic groups (whom he dubs "beige cultures"): "When the bookends of racial reconciliation refuse to move toward each other, others on the shelf are affected" (70).

Anderson uses Colossians 3 to identify attitudes and actions that should accompany relational efforts in what he calls the Racial Reconciliation Matrix. This section illustrates that biblical foundations and convictions concerning one's identity and position in Christ are of immense importance in approaching intercultural relationship-building.

Part 3. The Practical Groove

Anderson observes that the larger family networks of blacks, Asians and Latinos mean that they are more likely to return to church with another visitor than white persons. Further it is more probable that whites will not receive a high number of positive responses from those they share their church experience with.

Anderson coins the term *gracism*, that is, "positively giving grace because of race" (105-106). He explains:

Gracism, unlike racism, doesn't focus on race for negative purposes such as discrimination. Gracism focuses on race for the positive purposes of ministry and service. When the grace of God is communicated through the beauty of race, then you have gracism (114).

Anderson also notes that communication styles diverge between whites and blacks: "white churches focus on 'teaching the Word' and black churches focus on 'preaching the Word.' Good multicultural churches do both" (106). Here Anderson is taking "teaching" to involve a focus on information and "preaching" a focus on inspiration. In Bridgeway it is common to say "we teach for learning but we preach for living" (106). Anderson observes that Hispanics prefer preaching and Asians prefer teaching: "This may explain why Asians tend to integrate more easily into white churches and why

Latino and African-American church expression is similar” (107). Anderson tries to factor in these differences by having a number of preachers (he preaches 65% of the time) who present a plethora of preaching and teaching styles.

Anderson comments that for many blacks, “church is a verb, not a noun. Church is not a place where you go but something you have” (107-108). In particular, participation is a key part of worship from many African-Americans.

With respect to church music Anderson observes that while stereotypes must be avoided it is generally true that a classical piece will be seen as white music, even if played by a black woman. Further, if a white man is rapping “Amazing Grace” then this will be heard as black style. Yet, he acknowledges that as North American culture becomes more multicultural it becomes less common for people to make these associations. He advises each multicultural church to find its own mainstream dish, depending on the talent God has brought to the church. Ethnic and extreme forms of music are used at Bridgeway as “side dishes to the mainstream worship” (110). He adds, “A multicultural church serves up a musical meal that seeks to include every group” (110).

Part 4. The Lord of the Dance

Anderson presents what he dubs “The Divine-Human Timeline” as “A Biblical Rationale for Multicultural Ministry” (125). He begins with a somewhat superficial summary of Genesis 1-12 and, along the way, comments: “I think we can all agree that racism is not a skin problem but a sin problem” (131). Then he considers the Exodus, Christ (the Gospels), Acts 2, anticipation of the Lord’s return and of the new heavens and new earth. It is Anderson’s contention “that the whole of Scripture is about oneness” (135).

Anderson also devotes a chapter to considering what the New Testament has to teach about multicultural evangelism and challenges his readers “to learn new rhythms of evangelism” (145).

Anderson coins the terms *danceformation*, defining it “as the free-flowing use of spiritual gifts and talents within a multicultural body of believers in an environment where acceptance, freedom, love, and humour prevail in relationships and in the church” (148-149). But “[danceformation] must be preceded by transformation” (149). He observes, “Danceformation can happen only after those who have been transformed begin to synchronise at a level beyond verbal expression. It’s musical. It’s rhythmic” (150).

Key Components of Developing Effective Multicultural Ministry

In the course of the book Anderson identifies some key factors that are involved in developing effective multicultural ministries:

1. *Intentionality*. “Few churches become incidentally or accidentally multicultural due to changing demographics in their community, and those that do aren’t prepared to handle the multiple problems that confront them, many of which could be avoided” (37).
2. *Progression*. Anderson advises developing intercultural relationships “at a pace that is sustainable and respectful of privacy” (56). Rather than directly telling

someone you want to develop an intercultural relationship just engage in conversations which will allow the acquaintanceship to develop, gradually getting to the point where one can ask questions that will open up the other culture.

3. *Visibility.* Anderson recognizes that it is necessary to “elevate particular minority groups to visible positions so that others from that group can identify more readily with the church” (105). So, to incorporate Asians into the multicultural ministry of Bridgeway Anderson recognized the importance of playing their music and elevating the people who represent them and showing examples of their lives and cultures from the stage.
4. *Consistency with Core Values.* Anderson tells how one Sunday before the service he discovered that his creative arts ministry, responsible for preparing the congregation for the sermon, substantially involved blacks. A core value for Bridgeway was that of reflecting diversity in the church. Since this situation violated this core value Anderson insisted on some immediate changes and this was followed by a debriefing 48 hours later to ensure this situation would not recur.
5. *Development of Multiethnic Staff.* Anderson describes how an operations manager became a necessity once the church grew to 500-600 persons and how, to avoid being a biracial church, two years were spent searching for the right person, culminating in the employment of a Puerto-Rican girl from the Bronx.