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Book Review of Finding Faithful Elders and Deacons, by Thabiti M. Anyabwile (2012)

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The Integrated Church: Authentic Multicultural Ministry

Tracy M. Lewis-Giggetts
Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press, 2011,
188 pages, \$11.24, paper.

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When Jesus returns to this earth, he will receive a church that is “without spot, wrinkle, or blemish (Eph. 5:27), and that church is dynamically multicultural, multiracial, and subsequently, multidimensional. It will take a church that looks this way to accomplish the will of God on the earth” (p. 13). Therefore, in order for the Christian Church to accomplish the Great Commission, it must be multi-cultural and multi-ethnic, particularly at the local church level. This is the central thesis of *The Integrated Church* by Tracy Lewis-Giggetts, an African-American woman who owns her own consulting company and serves churches that are seeking authentic ethnic integration. Her purpose in writing this book is to establish that there is a need for multi-cultural churches, to help churches prepare for the mental, emotional, and spiritual shift require to make this change, and to give practical guidance and samples of churches that are successfully doing it. In the end, however, she emphasizes that each church must be guided by God as to specifically how they should become multi-cultural (pp. 173, 174).

The book, written for a popular audience, is divided into three main sections. The first section argues that Christian churches today must become integrated in order

to be the church that God designed, and to successfully accomplish the work that he has given the church to do. The second section offers to churches a strategy for authentic multi-cultural ministry, and the final section describes some practical steps and examples of churches actually working on integration.

Section One is composed of five chapters, beginning with a chapter that argues for a biblical mandate for multi-cultural churches. First, the author limits her book to ethnic diversity, as opposed to gender, age, or socio-economic diversity in the church. She states that cultural diversity is the most explosive and divisive, and that if the church gets this one right, the others will be easier to tackle. Lewis-Giggetts also debunks the idea of churches claiming to be “color-blind,” thus, simply ignoring the issue altogether. Her response is, “If a person doesn’t see my color, if he or she doesn’t see my culture, then in essence, that person doesn’t see me” (p. 19). She goes on to say that churches seeking to integrate must go beyond tolerating other cultures to the celebration of the diversity that God has created among his children. The biblical foundation of Lewis-Giggetts’ argument is found in Galatians 3:26-28; I Corinthians 9:22; and Deuteronomy 10:16-19, where Israel is commanded to “love those who are foreigners.”

The remainder of Section One is composed of Chapters Two through Five. Chapter Two emphasizes that Christians should focus on their common experience as followers of Jesus. Living as a Christian in a world of evil should bind our hearts together, even across the cultural divides that separate us. Christianity should

overshadow (but not eliminate) ethnicity when we relate to each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. Our cultural filter should be “superseded by the mind of Christ” (p. 37). Chapter Three proposes that Christians should embrace each other’s culture, recognizing that each culture adds value to the witness of the church to the world. As Christian congregations, we must be willing to endure the stress of the mental, emotional, and spiritual adjustments that must be made to integrate. Chapter Four challenges churches to confront the fear that has generated stereotypes of other groups. Both majority and minority church members and congregations have to honestly face their fears, and process them in a way that dissipates the paralyzing effect of fear. Only then can members of various backgrounds truly join together in sincere fellowship and love. This is best done in the context of developing relationships across ethnic lines. The last chapter of the initial section (Chapter Five) deals with the definition of a minority. Lewis-Giggetts makes a distinction between generalizations and stereotypes. Generalizations are traits that are common to many members of a particular group, though there is variation within the group. Stereotypes label all members of a group as exactly the same, almost like clones. When seeking to understand an ethnic group, we should start with generalizations, but not pigeonhole every member with them. Generalizations should be the starting point, whereas stereotypes tend to be the end point, where all members of the group are defined exactly the same. The author then describes the major ethnic categories of people in the United States.

Section Two of the book discusses the four C's of a multi-cultural strategy for a congregation. The four C's are: cultural awareness (Chapter Six), creativity (Chapter Seven), commitment (Chapter Eight), and Christocentric (Chapter Nine). Before a church can move toward integration, the leaders must help the members to examine "the criticisms, stereotypes, and assumptions one might have" of other groups. Leaders must also "create an environment conducive to safe and honest discourse" about cultural issues (p. 69). Christians must learn to see beyond what is perceived as culturally offensive talk, and seek to discern the motives of the other person. Rather than becoming defensive, we must help each other learn the customs and ways of our ethnic group. Defensiveness shuts down dialog. This requires the Holy Spirit to be in control, rather than the flesh. Christians must learn to critique their own assumptions about other groups, and must be willing to change them as they learn the truth as they interact with members of other cultures.

Creativity has to do with a willingness to discard tradition when it conflict with biblical teaching. A willingness to change, an acknowledgement that there is more than one correct way to do church, is vital for multi-cultural ministry. Commitment has to do with a willingness to stay with the change process long-term. A church in transition must be willing to see it through, even though things will be unsettled and uncomfortable for a period of time. Risk, sacrifice, perseverance, and intentional change are all vital to the success of multi-cultural ministry. Denying self for the good of all is necessary. Otherwise, it will be too easy to slip back into the comfort of being

only with my kind of people. Chapter Eight also lists five qualities that are essential for leaders of a church in transition to diversity. Christocentric, says the author, means that my identity as a Christian supersedes my ethnic identity. Our common relationship to Jesus is the bridge over the troubled waters of cultural conflict. Evangelism, fellowship, and altruism are the core ministries that Christ call us all to, and he invites us to join together in his name to accomplish his work. All humans have been broken by sin. As we share this common brokenness with fellow Christians, and with those we seek to evangelize, our common humanity takes us past the ethnic barriers, and we can have genuine love and fellowship. This will be a powerful draw for unbelievers, when they see a diversity of broken humans bound together by their common experience with Jesus.

In the final three chapters of the book (Section Three), Lewis-Giggetts gives practical ways to implement this strategy. In Chapter Ten she discussed the need for authenticity in the leadership team of the congregation. This authenticity will then spread throughout the congregation. This requires effective communication that can pass through the lenses of the various cultures without losing the original intent of the message. Leaders must know how to communicate with the various groups in language that carries the intended meaning. Pastors and other leaders must also deal with their own prejudices and bias, or else these will become the prejudices and bias of the entire congregation. Leaders must talk about their own fears, and members must see the change happening in the leaders. Then the members can follow on with them in

changing their thinking and attitudes. The subject of Chapter Eleven is the role of conflict in the conversion to a diverse congregation. The conflict cannot be avoided, but it can be handled in a healthy way. Spiritual warfare through united prayer is the answer. The task may seem impossible, like Israel before the walls of Jericho, but the power of God is able to break down the cultural barriers and ease the ethnic tensions as we cling to the promises and power of God. The final chapter (Chapter Twelve) looks at specific issues and cases. The issue of worship and music is highlighted. Is it really possible for African-Americans and Caucasians to worship together, week and after week? Lewis-Giggetts says yes, if each will release their grip on a single, correct way to worship or style of music. Christians must acknowledge that God is present and does his work in all styles of worship and music. The author relates an experience where God spoke to her through gospel hip-hop, which was a great surprise to her. But she learned that God is not limit by culturally defines styles and preferences. Finally, Lewis-Giggetts affirms that churches and members must be willing to do ministry in a way that seems strange or uncomfortable. Often, God calls us to do what we would not choose. But the focus should be on the growth of the kingdom, not our own comfort. She refers to an on-line church that was called to minister to people working in the porn industry. One way to move into diversity is to begin by partnering with a church of a different culture, doing ministry and serving together. The relationships established will help both congregations to become multi-cultural over time.

I think the book *The Integrated Church* is a helpful tool for those who are just beginning to consider multi-ethnic ministry. And it gives an African-American perspective, which is very important. The attempt to base the call to integration on the Bible is good, but perhaps could be stronger. I appreciate the strong emphasis in the book encouraging Christians to learn about other cultures and to intentionally build friendships with members of other ethnic groups. This is the foundation for all ministry in a setting of diversity.

The author does not deal much with the sociological and psychological dynamics that cause people to naturally segregate themselves in voluntary settings. I think that those interested in multi-cultural ministry need to be aware of these dynamics, and members need to be educated about them and how to counteract them at times. There are a few other things that I disliked about the book. The author uses the word *race* from time to time. Many scholars have abandoned this word, as it is based in biology rather than culture, and seems not to serve the discussion well, particularly because today there is a growing number of people who have a mixed biological heritage. *Culture* and *ethnicity* are better words to use when discussing diversity and multi-cultural groups. The author also makes a mistake that many people today make. The word *leadership* is often used to refer to a group of leaders in an organization. But the word *leadership* describes a relational process in a group; it is not a synonym for *leadership group*. From time to time I found a few of the sentences in the book to be

grammatically awkward. Of course the style of the book is intended to reach a popular audience, but still there are a few sentences that could use more careful editing.

The book is strong on conceptual ideas, but a little weak on the practical ways on implementing the concepts. Nonetheless, I would recommend it to those who are exploring the idea of leading their congregation into a multi-cultural ilk. Lewis-Giggetts is passionate about authentic diversity, and the situation in certain parts of the world is ripe for this type of ministry. Her book can provide ideas and encouragement for those who are called to move the church into the unity in diversity that God intends for his people.