

Bruce Milne, *Dynamic Diversity: Building Class, Age, Race and Gender in the Church* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2007), 190 pp.

There is now a diversity of literature pertaining to diversity in congregations. In recent years, a number of books have been written as resources for congregational leaders to nurture human diversity in community. A quick search on Amazon.com for the phrase “multicultural congregations” yields over 150 titles. Few of these, though, are aimed directly toward seminarians engaged in theological field education and praxeological reflection on their initial experiences in ministry. Theological field educators, therefore, must choose between the various books available for their students’ particular learning needs and challenges in ministry. *Dynamic Diversity* by Bruce Milne is one such book.

Drawing from his own experience as pastor of the First Baptist Church in Vancouver, Milne writes to inspire his readers with an inclusive reading of the gospel that would seek to gather a greater diversity of God’s children in Christian fellowship. Indeed, as Milne develops his position, it becomes clear that he sees such inclusive fellowship as the norm—and not just an option—for congregational life as a response to God’s call in Christ to all.

Citing the missiologist and historian Andrew Walls, Milne advocates a congregational model defined as “diversity in unity under Christ.”¹ This means, first, building churches that move in the direction of God’s purpose for the ages—all things together under Christ—and, accordingly, that selfconsciously set out to unite in Christ the diversities and polarities of their surrounding communities. Moreover, Milne confesses, to do so is a doxological praise to God.

Milne makes his case by appealing to Scriptural examples, theological doctrine, and an account of current trends in society. He attends in great detail to biblical materials as proof text and foundation for his argument. He appeals to the cosmic Christ depicted in Ephesians and Colossians, to the precedent of circumcision in Galatians, to the struggle over division in Corinth, to the fellowship of saints in Hebrews, and to the pentecostal community and mission in Acts. Doctrinally, Milne appeals to the Trinity, creation, incarnation, atonement, Ecclesiastes, and eschatology.

There is a sociological line of his argument as well, as he presents a picture of postmodern pluralism, citing authors as disparate as Andrew Walls, Alvin Toffler, and Ray Bakke. Again, though, he looks at this world confessionally—as one where Jesus is Lord—and concludes that “we can credibly establish a meaningful parallel between the first- and twenty-first century worlds.” He urges the contemporary church to be “prepared to become the modern equivalent of the instrument God used so effectively in the first century—a diversity-in-unity, ‘together under Christ’ community” (p. 84).

He urges us to view all “fellow Christians in Christ,” as people for whom Christ died, in whom Christ now lives, and through whom Christ will one day reign (pp. 144–145).

While this is a universal vision, it is not an absolute inclusivity. Milne expects this inclusive community of Christians to also reach a common moral understanding on certain matters and a consensus about sexuality in particular. He explains: “A specific clarification is required here, as the adjective ‘inclusive’ has come to mean, for some, a tolerance of sexual partnerships, particularly homosexual ones, that contravene the biblical mandate...” Milne recognizes that this is a divisive issue, but insists “Christians are, however, without exception, called to faithfulness to the clear teaching of Scripture, not least in this area” (p. 127).

It is here, at the limits of Milne’s understanding of inclusive community that this book’s usefulness for seminary programs in theological field education will itself be most clearly limited. It falls on one side of the chasm that threatens to divide the church. His manner of constructing his case, attending extensively to Scripture to proof test his position, will appeal most to more evangelical students in programs of study that employ similar methodological approaches. Here, its potential value is considerable, depending upon the manner in which it is taught. However, it will neither be convincing nor appreciated by progressive theological students, whose vision for inclusivity is to embrace a diversity of sexual orientation. Finally, Milne’s

sweeping and facile dismissal of sexual diversity will simply be disappointing to those students caught in the middle on this issue who are trying to address it with authenticity, faithfulness, and care.

NOTE

1. Andrew F. Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002), 72–78.

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