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Book Review: Multiculturalism: A Shalom Motif for the Christian Community (Domnwachukwu & Lee)

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BOOK REVIEW:
*MULTICULTURALISM: A SHALOM MOTIF FOR THE CHRISTIAN
 COMMUNITY (DOMNWACHUKWU & LEE)*
 BY NICHOLAS C. BLOCK

This rather short treatise is nonetheless ambitious in its aims. Seemingly written for a largely evangelical Christian audience, the authors from the beginning of the book seek to address misgivings that they believe their readers hold about multiculturalism. While conceding that multiculturalism has flourished in tandem with such belief systems as post-modernism, critical pedagogy, and even Marxism, the authors affirm that the faith community benefits from diversity and has a long-range redemptive goal that includes unity among people groups. Therefore, the authors emphasize that the mandate of multiculturalism cannot be ignored. As in the case of any philosophy or ideology, multiculturalism should be evaluated on its own merits. The rest of the book is an effort to do just that.

In trying to give multiculturalism a sympathetic evaluation, the authors first discuss both non-Christian and Christian views of the topic (Chapters 1-3), then review the basic tenets of multicultural education (Chapter 4), provide a discussion on the related topic of social justice (Chapter 5), and demonstrate the biblical foundations for multiculturalism (Chapter 6) -- all before setting forth their understanding of how a biblical understanding of *shalom* provides an appropriate framework for understanding multiculturalism (Chapter 7). Steps to achieving *shalom* are described in Chapter 8 before an interlude describing two exemplars of multicultural interaction in Chapter 9. The book concludes with a suggestion of broadening the application of multiculturalism to churches and Christian universities.

While it should be evident that the authors attempt to cover wide swaths of subject area in a short amount of time, they are able to provide some provocative insights and perspectives along the way. The initial defense of multiculturalism is indeed necessary for the target audience of conservative Christians. The authors' effort to ground multiculturalism biblically is discerningly accomplished with social justice in mind, while also providing a fresh view of Pentecost in light of the Tower of Babel: "Whereas at Babel one spoken language became many confusing tongues that divided, at Pentecost a diversity of tongues became a unifying force" (89). The authors intriguingly suggest that after Babel, where humanity demonstrated rebellion to God's mandate to spread out and differentiate, any interference with this process is tantamount to interference with God's mandate for cultural differentiation, and in effect, multiculturalism. Later on, the argument for a *shalom* motif in terms of physical well being, relational health, and moral integrity is informative, as is the effort later in the book to guide the reader to understand that multiculturalism requires intentionality.

BOOK REVIEW

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Justice, Spirituality, & Education Journal; Spring 2015, Vol. 3, No. 1; ISSN 2379-3538

Unfortunately, along with the significant insights the reader may encounter more than a few difficulties. A definition of multiculturalism is critically needed early on in the book, since readers come with diverse conceptions in mind. Instead there is an extended discussion of political ideologies, which, although somewhat helpful, hinders the forward motion of the discussion. On a more substantive note, the *shalom* motif, with its great potential, is not clearly extended beyond its initial discussion, which leaves one wondering: How exactly does multiculturalism relate to the specific categories of physical well being, relational health, and moral integrity? While the two exemplars in Chapter 9 are edifying, they stand more as noble testimonials rather than illustrations of the specific dimensions of the motif. What is needed once the idea of *shalom* is introduced are examples of how bringing two or more cultures or other societal groups together would assist both groups in moving toward *shalom* as here defined.

With reference to what was stated at the beginning of this review—that the authors are ambitious in their aims—their attempt to deal simultaneously at times with both multiculturalism and multicultural education becomes problematic. While biblical multiculturalism is shown to have firm biblical grounding and clear implications, multicultural education is not as clearly situated biblically. As a result, the boundaries between these two sometimes become muddled, especially when the authors seek to contrast secular and biblical approaches. For example, in Chapter 7 the secular approach to multicultural education is described as focusing on curriculum, equity, and social justice, and the biblical approach as focusing on carrying out the Great Commission, yet the authors themselves subsequently insist on social justice as essential to biblical multiculturalism, which certainly would impact biblical multicultural education as well.

Problems in the use of terminology can also distract or mislead the reader. For example, “American Christianity,” what the authors surely know to be a diverse entity, is several times referred to as though it were monolithic. There is also a naive use of Scripture at times. While Luke 4:18-19 is no doubt a challenge to many historic approaches to Christian ministry, to conclude from it that Jesus understood his role as a social liberator is in need of explication in light of how liberation theologians have proceeded in a reductionist manner partly based on this same passage. Perhaps most troublesome are occasional statements that cry out for referencing or evidence, such as when we read without any supporting detail that, “The Church has remained miles behind government and non-Christian organizations in providing employment access across ethnic lines” (133), although factual evidence of this statement can surely be verified.

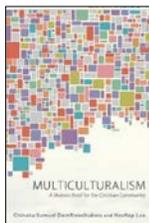
Multiculturalism: A Shalom Motif for the Christian Community, in sum, provides stimulating material for members of the conservative Christian audience who might venture into this field

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for the first time. The reader needs to be aware, though, that—whether or not a casualty of the ambitious aims of the authors—some of the material lacks conceptual unity and depth, as well as illustrative and evidential sections, which would better enable the book to serve its critically needed aims in the Christian community in the next edition.



MULTICULTURALISM: A SHALOM MOTIF FOR THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

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HEEKAP LEE

HeeKap Lee is Professor of Teacher Education at the Azusa Pacific University School of Education. He has been invited to speak at national and international settings, lecturing on Christian education, multicultural education, curriculum development, training evaluation and assessment, and school change. Among his other works are *Faith-Based Education that Constructs* (2010) and *Why Does a Well-Planned Innovation Fail? The Importance of Concern Analysis* (2010).



NICHOLAS BLOCK

After beginning his career in education as a science teacher in Bogotá, Colombia in 1984, Nick Block has worked most of his years in the U.S. as a public school teacher in grades three to five, in a variety of language settings. While concerned with all subject areas, in his teaching in East Los Angeles he most recently concentrated on issues of vocabulary development as a basis for reading comprehension and writing growth. Now with the implementation of the Common Core Standards, he feels that there is even greater urgency for improved teaching supported by sound research in these areas, especially for English learners. Past research in dual language education as well as decades of experience as a bilingual educator (including 26 years in Montebello USD) contribute to his concern that students grow as expert users of language. In addition to his work in K-12 schooling and teacher preparation as an adjunct at CSU Long Beach, Nick has been involved in theological education in Los Angeles, Colombia, and Rwanda. Whether supporting new teachers in teaching words or new pastors in teaching the Word, his greatest desire is to help others to be fruitful in their calling.

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