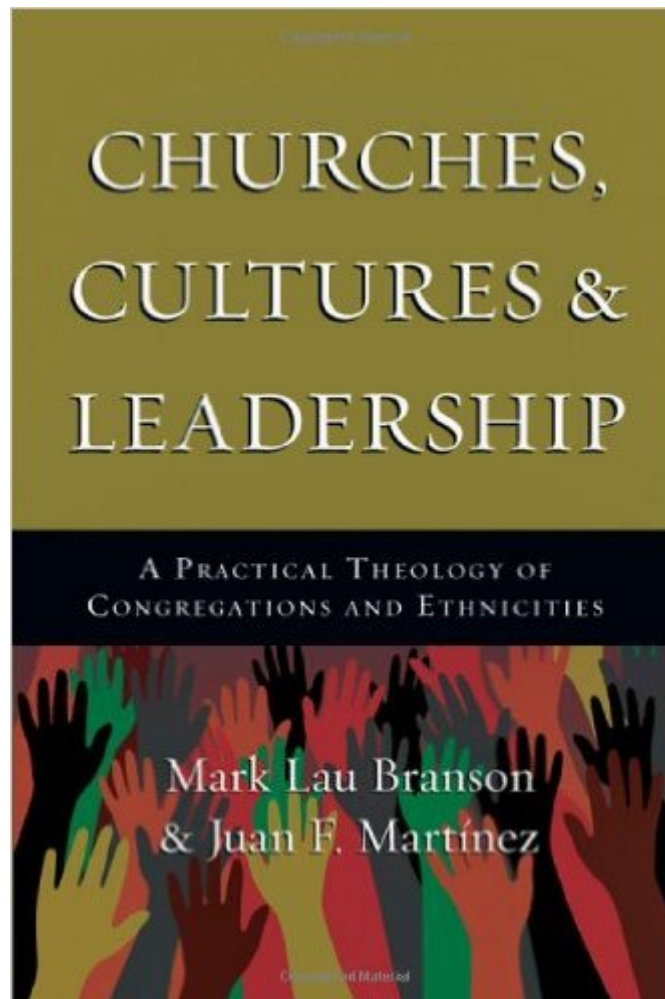


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# Churches, Cultures And Leadership: A Practical Theology Of Congregations And Ethnicities



## 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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Review originally posted at The Hillhurst Review ([...])For decades church growth gurus have taught conscientious pastors that one important key to the numerical growth of congregations is the "homogenous principle." That is, churches grow best when they focus on one type of person. "Like attracts like," goes the popular adage. Who can deny the truth of this? A church full of young

families, for example, is undoubtedly attractive to many other young families. In social settings people feel more at ease when they can identify others like themselves. In their new book, *Churches, Cultures & Leadership*, Fuller Theological Seminary professors Mark Lau Branson and Juan F. Martinez, challenge this conventional wisdom, arguing that church leaders need to take a fresh look at the role of churches in God's reconciling mission. "[C]entral to this book [is the question], what is the call of the gospel on churches? How can churches model gospel reconciliation and be agents of reconciliation and justice in our cities and in our nation? We believe that God's grace calls us beyond racism and ethnocentrism. The question is how to express the new reality of the gospel in ways that both celebrates our differences and draws us toward unity in Jesus Christ (17)." They approach their subject with academic rigor, pastoral concern for the church as well as a deep awareness of their own ethnic narratives and experiences. They have both served many years in multi-cultural congregations and now co-teach seminary students. The book aims at an ambitious target: to outline a practical theology of intercultural, congregational leadership. Any one of those themes would be challenging enough, but here, Branson and Martinez work at integration.

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.

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