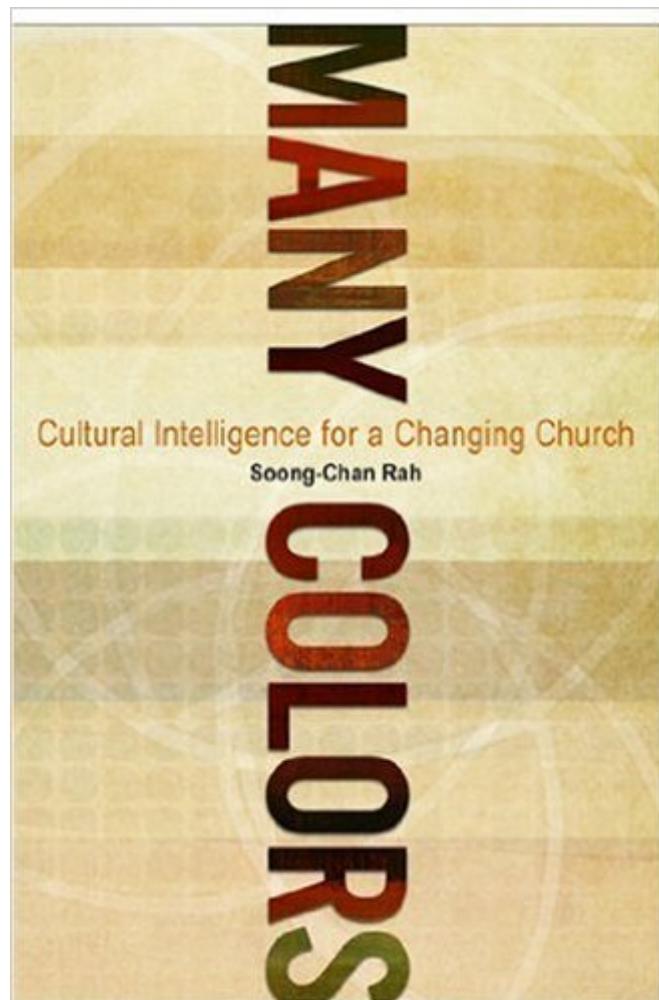


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Many Colors: Cultural Intelligence For A Changing Church



Synopsis

The United States is currently undergoing the most rapid demographic shift in its history. By 2050, white Americans will no longer comprise a majority of the population. Instead, they'll be the largest minority group in a country made up entirely of minorities, followed by Hispanic Americans, African Americans, and Asian Americans. Past shifts in America's demographics always reshaped the country's religious landscape. This shift will be no different. Soong-Chan Rah's book is intended to equip evangelicals for ministry and outreach in our changing nation. Borrowing from the business concept of "cultural intelligence," he explores how God's people can become more multiculturally adept. From discussions about cultural and racial histories, to reviews of case-study churches and Christian groups that are succeeding in bridging ethnic divides, Rah provides a practical and hopeful guidebook for Christians wanting to minister more effectively in diverse settings. Without guilt trips or browbeating, the book will spur individuals, churches, and parachurch ministries toward more effectively bearing witness to the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Good News for people of every racial and cultural background. Its message is positive; its potential impact, transformative.

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Customer Reviews

I anticipated and had hope that Dr Rah would do a follow-up to his The Next Evangelicalism which I also did a review for. TNE, I would say was more of a prophetic critique of 21st century Western Christianity, and there were many quotes I could use in the future that I believe ring so true, particularly Rah's analysis of the emerging church. In comparison, Many Colors: Cultural

Intelligence for a Changing Church was filled less so with observation and much more so with scholar/pastoral instruction. The text is divided into three sections, and since I do not want to give any spoilers, since I would highly recommend this book for anyone interested in doing multi-cultural & cross-cultural ministry, I will go through a few sections I found interesting. In part 1, Rah goes over traditional Christian approaches to culture, even mentioning Niebuhr's classic Christ & Culture (page 21). He then sets forth to argue the importance of remembering all of history, and not just the triumphant good stories that we like to hear, but also the narratives of sadness and oppression. In chapter 3, Rah articulates a theological vision of culture, where God's mission in the world is taken seriously and redeems even the "pagan" traditions of Christmas. Rah argues that one cannot appropriately appreciate culture as something that is just a human construct; we need to see both the sociological and theological merits of each culture, which in his view starts with the doctrine of the Imago Dei. This I believe is a necessary statement to differentiate Rah's approach to culture and an anthropologist's or a sociologist's. Without the notion of God gifting all of humanity to be creators of culture, equally and beautifully, we will fall into the trap of sayings like West is Best, East is least. Racism, Orientalism, and ethnocentrism begin with an anthropomorphic & androcentric view of culture, to the exclusion of the creator. What makes MLK Jr. a culture creator is that he firmly believed in the divine image in everyone, even his enemies. In part 2, Rah discusses what a multicultural worldview looks like, as well as what it means to examine power relations between cultural majorities and minorities. Chapter 5 gives insight into the possible paradigms that churches fall into. Churches have their own culture, and it is up to the congregation to discern what type of culture it has. Lastly, in part 3, Rah gives some practical advice about how to achieve a church sensitive to the biblical vision of multi-cultural cooperation and racial reconciliation.

Many Colors: Cultural Intelligence for a Changing Church is an excellent follow-up to The Next Evangelicalism: Freeing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity (TNE) and a welcomed companion. The two books make up an invaluable resource for contemporary disciples of Jesus Christ in the West. While TNE exposes the areas in which Western evangelicalism has been co-opted by Western cultural forces in contrast to biblical imperatives, Many Colors reveals God's beautiful kingdom, with its diverse cultural makeup. Many Colors answers the questions "What is culture and how should contemporary Western evangelicals engage it?" Many Colors also applies the discipline of cultural intelligence, now common among international businesses, to the church in the West--a much-needed improvement. Rah's work is vitally important to the American church and I am personally thankful for this book.

Important subject and good pastoral perspective. I don't know whether the church can get past our cultural blinders to fulfill Paul's dream expressed in Galatians, but this book makes an attempt to address the challenge of the multi-culture church. It is definitely for a North American audience, and one could wish for a more universal approach to a true cross-cultural perspective to the community of the redeemed, but the second culture experience of the author certainly helps. Worth the read and serious discussion for church leaders in every Christian community.

Although I grew up singing "Jesus loves the little children, red and yellow, black and white" I can't say that my context gave me much opportunity to practice this same love for the "other." Or perhaps the problem was that I didn't see the opportunities. If you suffer such "color blindness," this book by Soong-Chan Rah can help correct your vision. Framed within a kingdom-driven-, holistic gospel-, missional perspective, the author explores culture in its good and fallen aspects with a call to engage it responsibly. He provides a chapter on understanding our current North American cultural landscape in light of political, social, and ecclesial histories, answering how we got to where we are. His chapter on the spectrum of expressions within a culture is quite helpful as he examines differences such as: individual vs. group, guilt vs. shame, equality vs. hierarchy, direct vs. indirect, and task vs. relationship. Whether you aspire to plant a multi-ethnic church, or minister cross-culturally within a North American context or abroad, this book challenges you to examine aspects of power, dominant-culture privilege, and systems with new lenses. The book gives practical means too for hospitality and storytelling (under-the-radar evangelism) that easily translate from culture to culture. In contrast to McGavran's application of the homogeneous unit principle, Soong-Chan Rah advocates that despite numerous obstacles in society and human nature, God calls local churches to be a diverse community that truly represents the kingdom of God. I am glad to have required this book for my course Evangelism and Missions in an Urban Setting.

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