

ETHNIC BLENDS **MARK DEYMAZ**

How Can We ‘Change the World’?

When I entered full-time ministry fresh out of college in January 1984, my vision was simple: Share the Gospel, lead people to Christ, make disciples, change the world. Yet despite my best efforts for nearly 30 years, the world remains largely unchanged. Generally, it is, at best, cool in its openness to Christianity (“one of many religions”), unimpressed by its perception of Christians (self-serving, agenda-driven), and often disappointed in its experience with the church (judgmental, unforgiving). If anything, the collective cynicism of those without Christ is getting worse.

Perhaps you also set out with similar aims for your life and ministry: Win the world, change the world. And how many times have you heard someone say, “We’re going to take this city, change this country, for Christ!” But have you ever seen this happen?

Perhaps such rhetoric fails to become reality because we’ve been overly simplistic or naïve in our approach, too one dimensional in our strategy. How?

We Limit the Gospel

For one thing, our understanding and proclamation of the Gospel (in the West) is more concerned with heaven than with earth; with individual salvation, not collective redemption; with personal sanctification apart from sanctification of the church or community in which it sits. The Gospel of Christ is not merely eternal in its intent; it is temporal too. It is at once personal *and* corporate in nature. The *good news* we’ve been called to proclaim concerns eternal life, yes (John 17:2-3), but abundant life too—the advance of God’s kingdom on earth as it is in heaven (Matt. 6:9-13; 25:31-46; 28:19-20; John 10:10).

“Can a church really hope to redeem a community if it does not **reflect the community?**”

We Evoke a “Miracle Motif”

In addition, it’s unrealistic to think that just because people get saved, life will be good—a belief some call a “miracle motif.” A miracle motif can keep us from honest assessment of more earthly problems and practical solutions. In other words, given

the redeemed still struggle in this life with the flesh (Rom. 7, 8), the salvation of individuals (even the world, for that matter) will not alone bring an end to injustice, eradicate racism, guarantee access to quality education and health care, ensure equitable pay for work regardless of gender, prevent teens from getting pregnant outside of marriage, or provide a forever family for children waiting to be adopted.

We Speak in Vague Generalities

Finally, “change the world” rhetoric is unrealistic and vague. The fact is, only Jesus Christ can change the world. And while I’m not encouraging a lack of faith or otherwise limiting what God is able to do through your church, I am encouraging us to focus on a more specifically defined community of need. In other words, while you may not be able to take your city for Christ, you just might be able to bring *real community transformation* to a ZIP code, a neighborhood, or apartment complex when your vision is more precise. Couple this with humility and a willingness to labor in obscurity, and God will exalt your efforts beyond what you might otherwise ask or think possible (1 Pet. 5:6; Eph. 3:20-21).

To be clear, I’m not suggesting we should proclaim a social gospel as opposed to the Gospel of Jesus Christ; nor am I preaching salvation by works.

Nevertheless we should recognize that simply sharing the Gospel, or for that matter, planting and developing churches filled with people just like you (whoever “you” are) will not likely bring about *real community transformation*. Indeed, ask yourself:

Can a church really hope to redeem a community if it does not reflect the community, particularly in terms of ethnic and economic diversity?

Mark DeYmaz is the founding pastor of the Mosaic Church of Central Arkansas (MosaicChurch.net), and the author of Building a Healthy Multi-ethnic Church and Ethnic Blends: Mixing Diversity Into Your Local Church. His latest book, Real Community Transformation: Beyond Rhetoric to Results for the Glory of God was recently published by Leadership Network as part of its Leadia line. To download the book from which this column is excerpted, or to learn more about Leadia, visit Leadia.tv.

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