

ETHNIC BLENDS **MARK DEYMAZ**

# Multiethnic **and** Missional

**I**n an old television commercial for Reese's Peanut Butter Cups, a person eating a chocolate bar runs into another eating from a jar of peanut butter. "You got peanut butter in my chocolate!" he exclaims, and the other responds, "No, you got chocolate in my peanut butter!" Soon they realize the intrinsic goodness of the combined taste—the two go hand in hand.

In his latest book, *Church 3.0*, Neil Cole identifies the New Testament Church at Antioch as "multiethnic and missional." To my knowledge, this was the first time in print that these two expressions of the church have been linked. In the same month, I spoke at the Verge Conference on *Building a Healthy Multiethnic/Missional Community*. Conference organizers Matt Carter and Michael Stewart suggested the title of my workshop, recognizing (as the Reese's commercial illustrates) that the two go hand in hand.

## A Model Congregation

In fact, if you want a model for the local church in the 21st century, you need look no further than the New Testament church at Antioch. It was mega (Acts 11:21, 24, 26), missional (Acts 11:27-30) and movement-minded (Acts 13:1-3ff). But before any of these, it was multiethnic (Acts 11:19-20ff). Indeed, when a church practices a love for all people beyond mere words or platitudes, you can expect a great response and eager mobilization for the sake of the Gospel.

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Therefore, it is not surprising that the church at Antioch, and not the church at Jerusalem, was the first to send missionaries to the world. What made Antioch unique from Jerusalem was its diversity; and from within that context, a missional mindset naturally developed.

Yes, the church at Antioch was proactive and eager to send Paul and Barnabas off to distant lands (Acts 13:1-3). In contrast, it wasn't until the homogeneous church at Jerusalem experienced persecution that individuals were forced

to carry the message of Christ to diverse people of foreign lands (Acts 8:4-8; 11:19-20ff). And while Jerusalem is noted for its communal practices and for financial collections that provided so that "there was not a needy person among them" (Acts 4:34 NASB, emphasis mine), the church at Antioch was the first to take an offering for others in need beyond themselves (Acts 11:27-30).

## Complementary Mindsets

For all the talk today of being *missional*, then, it is interesting that much of the conversation seems to have grown out of a typically suburban context. To be clear, I am very thankful for my friends and colleagues who, like me, are challenging believers to go and be the church for the sake of the Gospel. In so doing, we rightly exhort one another "to not merely look out for (our) own personal interests, but also for the interests of others" (Phil. 2:4 NASB). Multiethnic church pioneers, however, are discovering that where diverse people walk, work and worship God together as one, a missional mindset is already present since cross-cultural *and* incarnational engagement is an everyday reality within their ministry context.

At the end of the day, a healthy multiethnic church is missional. Likewise, a healthy missional church will naturally embrace greater diversity over time, not only in its expression of compassion, mercy and justice to others outside the church, but to those who seek to be one with others inside it, as well.

So, multiethnic *and* missional? The two go hand in hand.

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