

Michelle Ami Reyes. *Becoming All Things: How Small Changes Lead to Lasting Connections Across Cultures*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2021. 208 pages. \$22.99. ISBN-10: 0310108918

In *Becoming All Things*, Michelle Ami Reyes, the vice president of the Asian American Christian Collaborative (AACC), presents contextual, reflective, and biblical pointers for crossing ethnic and racial boundaries in the American Christian landscape. Each chapter of this eight-chaptered book begins with Reyes' personal experiences highlighting various cross-cultural engagement themes, serving as contexts for intercultural biblical reflection, and ends with providing practical steps towards building effective long-term relationships. Through eight chapters, Reyes wrestles with what it means to "become all things," modeling Paul's model in 1 Corinthians 9:22, especially regarding crossing racial and ethnic boundaries to love the other in Christ.

In chapter one, Reyes unpacks the notion of cultural identity within the multicultural American context and argues to see "culture as a narrative system" (8) to value people instead of assuming where they are from or what they do. Hence the biblical analysis in the chapter is regarding the importance of cultural diversity within the Christian community instead of flattening various cultural narratives into one single generic story (14). Consequently, chapter two argues for moving beyond cultural stereotypes and prompts us to get to know people as individuals and learn from them "what their culture means to them" (27).

In chapters three to five, Reyes unpacks three common pitfalls in cross-cultural or racial engagements: cultural accommodation, code-switching, and cultural appropriation. In order to redefine cultural accommodation, in chapter three, Reyes challenges the popular idea of cultural flexibility that fails to make room for discomfort in cross-cultural engagement. Popularly, as Reyes notes, "cultural differences make us uncomfortable so we decide they are wrong and must be stopped" (53). Consequently, as a Christian response, instead of cultural policing, Reyes proposes that "we change ourselves for them;" such is the "theology of cultural accommodation" (55). In chapter four, Reyes deals with the dynamics of code-switching, where minorities are prompted to "change our language and mannerism depending on which culture we want to be accepted in" (74). However, as a response, through Paul's example of 1 Corinthians 9:19, Reyes exhorts; "the question we should be asking ourselves is not, "What do I need to change about myself to fit in?" but rather, "When can I adapt my words, behavior, or dress for the sake of the gospel?" (80). In chapter five, Reyes engages with yet another overlooked cross-cultural factor, i.e., cultural appropriation. For Reyes the problem of appropriation is not in the "simple concepts of cultural sharing" of food or decorations but in the "act of superimposing one's own understandings of another culture over the actual culture and treating it as a cheap accessory" (95).

The final three chapters—six to eight, deal with three more areas of reconstruction necessary for effective cross-cultural engagement; they are a) in breaking our cultural comfort zones, b) redefining linguistic expectations, and c) re-learning what is justice. In chapter six, Reyes exhorts to never lose the sense of urgency in meeting the cultural other and take the risk of breaking our comfort zones. In chapter seven, within the backdrop of language difficulties in cross-cultural communication, Reyes calls to redefine how we communicate with one another while embracing the "power of silence" (137) and ambiguities that come with cross-cultural communication. Finally, in chapter eight, Reyes deals with the concept of justice and makes a case for the privileged to take the backseat and "let the minorities lead the conversation" (156). Reyes makes the case through an intercultural reading of Paul's exhortation in 1 Corinthians 9:22

(“to the weak I became weak, to win the weak”). Consequently, Reyes notes, “if you have power and privilege, you will have to take off your lenses of privilege, power, and conform and replace them with a lens that sees the world through the embodied lives and experiences of those on the margins” (155, 156).

Collectively, *Becoming all things* provides a much-needed toolkit for effectively engaging in cross-cultural conversations. Reyes does impressive work in intertwining personal experiences, biblical reflection, and cultural analysis on some of the most controversial topics in the intellectual landscape of race relations in America. As a fellow Indian American, I resonate with numerous stories Reyes mentioned, and it is refreshing to hear such voices represented in the intellectual space. It should also be noted that throughout the book, Reyes’ objective is not just to deconstruct oppressive and unhealthy narratives around cross-cultural conversations but to provide practical ways to reconstruct healthy narratives for creating lasting multi-ethnic/racial relationships as part of the unified kingdom of God.

At the same time, the book is not without limitations. One standout limitation is regarding Reyes’ individualized understanding of culture (35, 36). While Reyes does an excellent job of highlighting the need to consider the individual first instead of approaching others with cultural stereotypes, the notion of ethnic culture as a collective unit seems underdeveloped. In other words, the book heavily relies on identifying the uniqueness of an individual’s ethnicity from their self-defined position (for building an effective one-to-one cross-cultural relationship) and sidesteps the collective consciousness of culture at large. For example, (from the Indian cultural perspective) irrespective how individuals differ in self-identifying their own Indian cultural story, there often remains a collective notion of ‘Indian-ness.’ Such a collective is seldom engaged in Reyes’ analysis.

However, this limitation should not deter anyone from delving into this resource. The work is good for anyone who is looking for an introductory level practical theology resource that integrates important concepts concerning race and ethnic relations narrated through a personal reflective mode.

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