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Nelson Silva

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BOOK REVIEW:

EMBRACING THE NEW SAMARIA

Opening Our Eyes to Our Multicultural Future

Alejandro (Alex) Mandes.

NavPress. Colorado Springs, CO. 2021. Total pages: 210.

MOMENTS BEFORE Jesus ascended to heaven, He promised the Holy Spirit to the disciples and gave them the Great Commission: "...You shall be witnesses to me in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria..." (Acts 1: 8). Doctor Alejandro Mandes, a college professor, church planter and church consultant, challenged the Church to consider the marginalized in North America as the "New Samaritans." Just like Jesus turned the disciples' cultural tables of preferences, privileges, and prejudices when visiting with a woman at Jacob's well, today many Christians should face a new missional paradigm shift. Refugees, immigrants, and other marginalized ethnic minority groups might be poor, have a different culture, or speak a different language; and yet, the Church is called to reach them in spite of differences. Interestingly, the Church sends missionaries to other countries and gives financial support to evangelistic efforts overseas; however, it fails to reach its own neighbors. Would the dominant Church set aside preferences, privileges and prejudices to welcome the new Samaritans that are among them?

Mandes was born in Laredo, Texas. His ancestors experienced what approximately 150,000 people went through in 1848—"The borders crossed us." Thanks to the treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, one day they were Mexican citizens, and the next day they could choose to be U.S. citizens by conquest.¹ For Mandes, as well as for many others, that meant a cultural syncretism that permeated behavior—language, food, and music, among many other external cultural expressions—as well as values and beliefs. Better

said, a Mestizo-Spanish culture was born, adding English to their Spanish-Indigenous colonial history.

Moving from a majority-minority community in South Texas to an all-White community at the University of Texas, Mandes not only experienced culture shock but also found the love of his life and Mission. Little did he know that his Latino heritage in a White-dominant Christianity, as well as his bicultural marriage, would pave the way to his passion for multiculturalism in the Church. As a social worker and community developer, Mandes had a clear understanding of people in the margins. As a pastor, trained in the Dallas Theological Seminary, he gained an understanding of the goal of the Church: Make disciples. Are serving the marginalized and making disciples mutually exclusive?

The Church is clearly split and confused when it comes to defining its mission. If the mission of the Church is only to make disciples (Mt 28:18-19; Mt 4:19), favoring the proclamation of the Gospel (Mt 24: 14), then what is the Church to do with Mathew 25: 31-46, James 1:27, 1 John 3:16-18, and Isaiah 58 that clearly commission the Church to love the marginalized community?

Mandes eloquently articulated what Dallas Willard, in his Book *The Divine Conspiracy*, calls, "The two camps of the Church." The believer's response to Sin is to Manage it (Sin Management) by proclaiming the Good News, or embracing Social Justice. The former is private (I accept Jesus Christ as my savior for the forgiveness of my sins), while the latter is public—I love the oppressed and meet the needs of

¹ National Archives, *Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo* (1848). <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/treaty-of-guadalupe-hidalgo>. Accessed on May 1, 2023. National Park Service, American Latino Theme Study: Law, Latinos and The Law. [https://www.nps.gov/articles/latinothemestudy/law.htm#:~:text=The%20War%20ended%20with%20the,and%20become%20citizens%20by%20conquest](https://www.nps.gov/articles/latinothemestudy/law.htm#:~:text=The%20War%20ended%20with%20the,and%20become%20citizens%20by%20conquest.). Accessed on May 1, 2023.

the poor, orphaned, and widowed because I am forgiven.² What Willard and Mandes proposed is that the mission of the Church should be “Both, And” as opposed to “Either, Or.”³ Mandes went further to include the community transformation in what he conceptualized as the “3GC.” 1) The Great Commission—Go and Make Disciples. 2) The Great Commandment—Love your neighbor as yourself 3) And The Great Community—The Early Church example found in Acts 2: 42-47.

The author contended that if the Church is loving people, bearing their pain as if their own, earning the right to disciple one another and become disciple-makers, then the real test of fulfilling the mission is the transformation within the Church and their effect on the surrounding community.

Mandes wrote for the average dominant culture church member in relatable, polite, and yet straightforward language. The author’s clear goal was to shock the reader with a glimpse of the struggles of ethnic minorities in America today as well as with the statistical projections of a future without a dominant culture in America. He contrasted the present and future realities of America with the Biblical mandate of making disciples in an effort to move the Church into action. The writer illustrated his points generously and ended each chapter with cognitive challenges as well as behavior modification steps to shift the reader from a scale of “None Multicultural Exposure” to “Embracing Cultural Diversity.” Mandes challenged the reader even more: “No matter how much you love people, the main objective is to lead people to Christ!” On the same note, inviting people to follow Christ without loving them fosters, unequivocally, a Pharisaical atmosphere.

Although Mandes’ driving point throughout the book was the “3GC,” his emphasis seemed to be heavy on the Great Commandment. He noticed that the Church appears to be heavily invested in the Great Commission but seems to forget the other two mandates. Perhaps this assertion is true in many circles, particularly in the Seventh-Day Adventist Church; however, others have challenged that

assumption. Barma, for instance, reported that only 51% of the churchgoers have heard about the Great Commission, of which, 17% knew what it meant.⁴ But, Mandes dedicated significant space in his book to reflect on social justice for the marginalized as opposed to discipleship. He maintained that the Great Commission is what the Church is supposed to be doing while the Great Commandment is how the Church is to do it. Furthermore, when Mandes discussed discipleship, he stated that there should be more than one way to make disciples, including cultural variations, and a shorter time. Therefore, he was not wanting to prescribe an inflexible, one-size-fits-all sort of program. He also affirmed that the Bible should override cultural discipleship preferences for the disciple-maker as much as for the one being disciplined. Embedded in his vision of discipleship, Mandes highlighted the Disciple Maker, which echoes the words of Ellen White who affirmed, “Every true disciple is born into the kingdom of God as a missionary.”⁵

Church members from the dominant culture would benefit from *Embracing The New Samaria* as a tool for understanding multiculturalism from a missional perspective. Although Mandes mainly gave examples from Latino communities, he went out of his way to include other minority groups in his arguments. Also, this book should be complemented by a discipleship plan, additional literature, or a series of seminars. Equally possible, the GC3 could be a refreshing way to introduce the famous quote of Ellen G White, “Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people.”⁶

Reviewed by Nelson Silva, associate youth director of the Kentucky-Tennessee Conference.

2 Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God*. <https://dwillard.org/divine-conspiracy-teaching-series>. Accessed on May 1, 2023.

3 Chap Clark and Kara Powel, *Deep Ministry In A Shallow World*, 115.

4 Barma. *Translating The Great Commission*. <https://www.barna.com/greatcommission>. Accessed on May 1, 2023. Turner, Jill. The State of The Great Commission. National Christian Foundation. Sep 5, 2022. <https://www.ncfgiving.com/stories/the-state-of-the-great-commission/#:~:text=Beyond%20this%2C%20only%2037%20percent,five%20passages%20in%20a%20list>. Accessed on May 1, 2023.

5 White, Ellen. *The Desire Of Ages*, 195.

6 White, Ellen. *The Ministry of Healing*, 143.