

‘Malcolm Patten has brought together hard-won experience from his leading of multicultural churches with profound and helpful reflections from his careful study of the work of theologians, philosophers, and political and social scientists as well as other church leaders. The result is a book that will be of great assistance to both new and experienced church leaders in multicultural contexts and also to those who seek to understand, encourage and support them.’

The Ven. Dr Andy Jolley, Archdeacon of Bradford

‘Multicultural Britain throws up many challenges, not least for the Church whose gospel is that Christ died to create one new humanity. Affirming this in theory is one thing (although sadly not all even do that); bringing it into being in a local church is another. In this book, Dr Patten takes nothing for granted. He presents a biblical survey showing how God’s grace embraces everyone and seeks to incorporate all into one people. He then surveys differing contemporary approaches to integration and multiculturalism, before applying this to leading a local church in worship, pastoring, growing other leaders and mission. He often uses his own experience, both failures and achievements, as examples. Among the great values of this book for all ministering in multicultural Britain is its superb and insightful blend of theology, theory and practice. It should be widely read and not just by those in the thick of our multicultural cities, since the issues concern the heart of the gospel and concern us all.’

*Dr Derek Tidball, Visiting Scholar at Spurgeon’s College, London,
and previously Principal of the London School of Theology*

‘There is no greater joy or challenge in ministry than leading a multicultural church. The call of God is to lead, but that leadership can only be truly effective if both the minister and church members are willing to understand and grapple with the tapestry of ethnicities and cultures in their midst, and to do so prayerfully, lovingly and biblically. I did not realize that fully until, like Malcolm Patten, God called me to lead in churches across East London, one of the most richly diverse and exciting areas of our nation. In this book, Malcolm Patten offers well-researched wisdom and insightful reflection from his own experience on this challenge, which create signposts that can only enhance our leadership, whatever the diverse context.’

The Rt Revd Peter Hill, Bishop of Barking

‘The United Kingdom in recent years has increasingly become a multi-cultural society. This brings excitement and challenges for the whole of society and particularly for ministers and churches. This book deals with the issues and challenges of multiculturalism in the Church and provides suggestions and guidelines to lead a successful multicultural church from the author’s personal experience of such ministry. The author has also expressed the desire of God rooted in Scripture for church to be of every race, colour, nation, tribe and language, thus leaving us with the missiological challenge to engage with different communities. I believe this resource will be of great inspiration and motivation to church leaders and churches as they continue to minister in the multicultural context.’

*The Revd Shahbaz Javed, Walthamstow
United Reformed Asian Church, London*

‘What do church leaders do when their congregations look like a mini version of the global village? I suggest they reach for this book! Malcolm Patten has chosen a massive topic to address, and I admire his courage. His dream to see our cities full of thriving and relationally functional multi-ethnic churches is one that I commend and equally desire. The book is not always comfortable reading because he is honest about how clumsy we have been at achieving this goal, but there is still hope. Revisiting our concept of churches comprised of members of multi-ethnic origins and the layered culture dynamics present in each group is the place to start a challenging journey. This book should prove a helpful map to get you going in the right direction. These pages contain academic rigour, pastoral transparency and the honesty that tries to yoke them together to make church “do-able” . . . in full technicolor!’

*The Revd Douglas C. Williams, Senior Leader of Emmanuel
Community Church International, Walthamstow*

‘Insightful, packed with wisdom and good ideas. This is an inspiring read for those who desire to grow healthy multicultural church.’

*The Revd Rupert Lazar, Minister of East Barnet Baptist Church
and President of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, 2016–17*

LEADING A
MULTICULTURAL
CHURCH



Malcolm Patten



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*Dedicated to my wife, Maria, and daughter, Anna,
with whom I share the joy of following Jesus every day*

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Foreword

Desperate to rebuild a Britain ravaged by the horrors of the Second World War, the British government called upon the skills and resolve of people from the Caribbean to help resurrect a crumbling economy. On 22 June 1948 the cruise ship *Empire Windrush* docked at Tilbury Dock, Essex. Jamaicans, Trinidadians and other Caribbean islanders walked down the gangplank onto British soil, not imagining that their journeys would prove a turning point in the history of the UK.

The story of Asian migration converged with that of Caribbean. In the face of a struggling workforce, communities from the Indian subcontinent were targeted, recruited and filled numerous job vacancies in the NHS and other organizations. Britain was on its way to becoming a host nation to a wide range of ethnic groups, a process accelerated in 1972 by the expulsion of South Asians from Uganda. Migration from Africa – in particular of West Africans, coming largely as students and business people – increased from the 1990s onwards, and it is impossible to exclude from this growing list the burgeoning numbers of Eastern Europeans entering the UK in recent decades and the vast numbers of vulnerable people seeking sanctuary from war-torn countries. Just like those who came before them, these newer arrivals are exploring ways of belonging to Britain's ever-changing cultural tapestry.

Churches, whether located in the rural suburbs or the sprawling cities, are unable to avoid these tectonic shifts in demographics. These days, it does not matter where the church you serve is situated, the diffusion of minority ethnic groups into large numbers of churches reinforces the need for and importance of this book.

Leading a Multicultural Church is a resourceful companion that can help church leaders do what it says on the tin. There are at

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least three ways in which this book will prove to be very helpful. First, its contents are reflective of an author who has listened to his congregations before putting pen to paper. Based on his listening, Malcolm Patten has developed helpful theories and strategies to enable church leaders to begin to address some of the obstacles that may prevent a church from becoming a genuine multicultural community. It is a book laden with practical advice and wisdom from an experienced pastor and it will be a supportive friend to any church leader committed to developing a culturally just church.

Second, the book has a helpful biblical underpinning. The chapters on ‘Thinking biblically about multicultural church’ provide a scriptural and theological rationale for leading such a church. The biblical narratives are extensions of what was incarnate in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ and they bear witness to the barrier-breaking mission of God, reaching a climax in worship where all cultures find freedom of expression and none feel dishonoured. These chapters provide the biblical reasoning why church leaders need to be committed to making God’s vision a reality.

Finally, this book is long overdue. For years church leaders have been struggling to find effective ways of developing and leading multicultural churches. There are few programmes or courses available to equip ministers with the skills and competencies required for cultivating a culturally diverse congregation.

And so, in the light of a rapidly changing church landscape, with church leaders needing support in this area, this book is an essential read for those training or currently leading such churches. *Leading a Multicultural Church* is not just an engaging and insightful read, it is also abundant in practical wisdom and strategies, and is a vital resource for every church leader seeking to lead and facilitate a congregation underpinned by the values of justice, mercy and liberation.

*The Revd Wale Hudson-Roberts
Racial Justice Advisor
Baptist Union of Great Britain*

Acknowledgements



I wish first to acknowledge my friends and colleagues Rupert Lazar and Wale Hudson-Roberts. We met at college, where we dreamed of what a multicultural church might look like, and we have continued to discuss, debate and work towards fulfilling that vision ever since. I continue to appreciate the friendship of Augustine and Confidence Njamnshi, who are like a brother and sister to me and constantly remind me that Africans see things differently. Augustine took me on a grass-roots tour of Cameroon some 15 years ago and helped me to see life through another's eyes, an experience which continues to influence my thinking today.

I am deeply grateful to God for the congregations I have been privileged to serve as minister: Tottenham Baptist Church, where I began and learned so much the hard way; West Croydon Baptist Church, which allowed me to carry out qualitative research within the congregation; and Blackhorse Road Baptist Church, Walthamstow, who have been exceedingly gracious in allowing me a sabbatical to help this book along the way. Many of the illustrations and examples in the book are based on encounters and experiences among these communities.

I am indebted to Spurgeon's College, London for their hospitality and support. The biblical reflections and theoretical material in the book have arisen out of my studies and research there and at times, during the writing of the book, the college has been my second home. It was the staff of Spurgeon's College who encouraged me on various occasions to convert my doctoral thesis into a practical book to serve the Church and it is to their credit that this book is finally seeing the light of day.

Acknowledgements

In the writing of the book my thanks go to Tracey Messenger, commissioning editor at SPCK, who with her sharp eye and keen mind has undoubtedly improved the book and its usefulness to all who read it, though any remaining errors or weaknesses are mine and mine alone. Many people have been kind enough to discuss parts of the book with me or advise on certain aspects of it. There are too many to mention but the book is the richer for their input. A shorter version of Chapters 2 and 3 appeared in the journal *Evangelical Quarterly* (Vol. 85.3, July 2013) under the title 'Multicultural Dimensions of the Bible', and I remain grateful to the late New Testament scholar I. Howard Marshall for his kind encouragement.

Finally, my wife Maria and daughter Anna have sacrificed family time to allow me to complete my work on the book. Maria has continually encouraged me to 'get on and finish it!', not because she is sick of it, but because she believes it can make a difference. I am immensely grateful for their love and support.

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Introduction

My story

Any discussion in the area of multiculturalism is fraught with vested interests. Who is speaking is as important as what they are saying. So I will begin with my own story, pause to lay my cards down on the table and declare my hand. The deficiencies in what I write will then be evident by the limitations of my experience, but I trust that in sharing what I have learned, it may be useful to many whose experience and journey is different from mine.

I grew up in Hartlepool, in the north-east of England. It is a town with a relatively settled population and until recently its inhabitants were almost entirely of white British origin. I remember two boys at my secondary school who were black, and a family of Vietnamese refugees who moved into a house near my home church. I also remember local youths daubing racist remarks on the refugees' garden fence. In my home church we occasionally had an Asian person join us for a time as he or she worked out a placement at the local hospital. And my parents were the missionary representatives for our church, which meant we often hosted missionaries on home leave as they recounted their adventures in places far away.

When I moved to London to begin my training for the Baptist ministry, my closest friends were fellow students who were British but originated respectively from Trinidad and Tobago and Nigeria. The whole experience of moving to London from the north-east of England and building new friendships with

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people whose ethnic backgrounds were different from my own opened my eyes and my heart in a new way to the diversity of the world I lived in.

I began my first full-time pastorate as the minister of a Baptist church in north London. The congregation of around 60 people represented a mixture of nationalities, though English and Jamaican people dominated statistically. There were people from other Caribbean countries, from West African countries, in particular Nigeria and Ghana, and from Europe, including Spain, Italy and Ukraine. After nine years I moved to become the associate minister at a larger church in Croydon, a church with a similar ethnic mix to the church in Tottenham but with the added presence of people from countries in Asia such as Pakistan, India and Sri Lanka.

It quickly became evident that the pastoral task in both congregations required a diverse approach for a diverse community. Customs vary greatly between people of different ethnic backgrounds, revealing themselves not only in the arrangement of infant blessings, weddings and funerals, but also in a myriad of ways in general church life. Musical expectations, styles of praying, preaching and leadership all vary from culture to culture. Some people expect a speedy welcome visit when visiting a church for the first time, whereas others are put off by such an immediate intrusion upon their privacy. Concepts of children's work, evangelism and social concern also vary. Contrasting theologies of healing, giving and hospitality can lead to cultural clashes and embarrassment.

Beyond these expressions of difference deeper issues emerged. There was the issue of power in the church: why is the indigenous host community over-represented in the leadership? Is it a problem, and if so, how can the situation be changed? Why does a welcome to the 'stranger' often generate an assumption that the church belongs to one particular ethnic group? In other words, 'I welcome you into my home, but it is still *my* home. I welcome you to my church but it is still *my* church.' Both

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first-generation immigrants and members of the indigenous host community had lived through significant changes in the ethnic make-up of their community. Yet, I realized, their experiences had never been discussed within the life of their church. People who worshipped together as a church family and had known each other for years had little insight into one another's lives. They had never listened to one another's stories.

There seemed to be a fear of conflict, a concern that if the issues were raised and the differences discussed then it would inevitably lead to disagreement and racism. Nevertheless, my response in both communities was to set about exploring the issues raised in multicultural churches. In Tottenham, a six-week course led by the London Baptist Association's Racial Justice Co-ordinator provided just such an opportunity. Those who joined in shared the pains and joys of their experiences, growing closer to each other and deepening their understanding of their world. A booklet was published by the church containing 13 stories of different people's experiences of living in a multicultural community. On the day of its launch the Mayor of Haringey, himself originally from Guyana, came and spoke at the church; directing his remarks particularly to the black young people in the congregation, encouraging them to pursue education, he thereby demonstrated his own grasp of one of the significant issues of the time.

We also set aside a day for members of the congregation to host meals in their homes with people from differing ethnic backgrounds. This led to a journey of discovery for many as they saw for the first time the different tastes of others, such as their choice of decor, and shared their stories first hand.

When I moved to Croydon it was to join the Trinidadian colleague I had known from college days, in part because we had a common interest in the issues that arise in multicultural churches. We felt a call from God to work together to tackle these issues and explore what it meant to be a multicultural church in the UK. During this time I conducted research among

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the congregation, asking open-ended questions such as how members of the congregation felt about being part of a multi-cultural church, what they liked or didn't like about it. Some of the quotes and examples in this book come from that period of research. I have changed names and some particulars where necessary to maintain an element of anonymity.

I currently serve as senior pastor of a church in Walthamstow in east London, where the greater Muslim presence in the local community has presented a new challenge but has also given me the opportunity to implement in a fresh context learning points that arose from my earlier research. I am married to Maria, the daughter of Jamaican immigrants, and we have one daughter who delights in her diverse heritage. For the purposes of this book I asked her 'How do you describe yourself?' 'Mixed,' she replied. I asked her whether she thought that was a good thing or a bad thing. 'Good, I like it,' she said. 'Because I have a bit of Jamaican and a bit of Hartlepool in me.' She spends her days at school mixing with young people of many different ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds. Her church too brings her into contact with a great variety of people and influences. It is with her future in mind that I offer this book.

The purpose of this book

Britain has always had elements of ethnic diversity, but since the 1950s that diversity has increased dramatically. The post-war period saw an influx of people from the Caribbean who were encouraged to work in the UK, many planning to return home after a few years. There are a variety of stories as to how they were received. Some migrants went along to their local church and were welcomed and assisted to settle; many were marginalized yet persisted in attending the established Church. But because of the mixed reception new expatriate churches were planted, places those rejected by the main denominational churches could call their spiritual home.

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In the following decades increasing numbers of Africans came to study in the UK as part of the British Commonwealth's endeavour to encourage the economic development of former colonial countries. People from other parts of the world were also finding their way to the UK, particularly in response to conflict or persecution; in the 1970s these included Asian people purged from Uganda and Vietnamese boat people.

Certainly people from the Caribbean and Africa were much more likely to want to attend church than the indigenous British and this has, on reflection, been the saving grace of what otherwise has been a bleak period in the history of the Church in Britain, particularly in its major cities. The loss of confidence and faith as a consequence of the two world wars has in part been mitigated by the enthusiasm and commitment of immigrants who have made the UK their new home. And although there are many examples of racism, many lessons have been learned by the major denominations: a greater awareness of the issues in multicultural congregations has been encouraged, racial justice issues have been addressed and diversity celebrated. We are a long way from where we need to be in these areas but progress has undoubtedly been made.

This book aims to grapple with the situation we find ourselves in now, which has changed again in four significant ways. It has changed first of all because the rate of immigration has increased in recent decades. Between 2001 and 2011 the proportion of people in Britain from ethnic minority backgrounds increased from 13 per cent to 20 per cent. In London, in 2011, over 55 per cent of people were from ethnic minority backgrounds.¹ These demographic changes are reflected in an analysis of the ethnic diversity of church attendance. The English Church Census of 2005 revealed that 83 per cent of churchgoers were white, 10 per cent black, and 7 per cent from other non-white backgrounds; in London, only 42 per cent of churchgoers were white, 44 per cent black and 14 per cent from other non-white backgrounds.²

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People now migrate to the UK from many different places and so the diversity within churches that are already multicultural has increased further. Whereas there may once have been a relatively small number of recognizable groups within church life (the Jamaicans, the Nigerians, the South Asians), the spread of ethnicities within such congregations is now much wider, including people from central and eastern European countries, China and South America. One of the ways that this has a direct impact on congregations is that whereas migrants from the former British colonies generally spoke English, many new migrants are less proficient in the language, and therefore communication is a much greater problem. The continuing rise of expatriate congregations in a mother tongue bears witness to this.

A second way in which the situation in the UK has changed is that whereas multicultural churches were once mainly found in the major towns and cities, increasingly migrants are settling in towns and villages whose populations have hitherto remained largely indigenous. There are four reasons for this: legislation distributes asylum seekers around the UK once their claim has been received; local councils in the major cities relocate migrant families because of housing shortages; migrant families themselves choose to move out to areas that are more affordable; and migrant families who have grown in affluence choose to move to more desirable areas to live.

The change has come about, third, because those who formed part of earlier migrations have been settled for some time and their children and grandchildren, second- and third-generation migrants, have grown up in Britain. This means that they express their ethnic identity in a variety of ways. Some are keen to maintain strong ties with the customs and traditions of their ancestors, some are much more assimilated into British ways, and many have the ability to foster both aspects of their heritage. Inter-ethnic marriage has also played its part; children of mixed heritage represent the fastest growing 'ethnic minority' and are inherently multicultural in their identity.

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The fourth change is that the political environment has become increasingly hostile towards new migrants and many are struggling to make their way in life in the UK. Many encounters between churches and migrants, whether members of those churches' congregations or not, will relate to visa or welfare issues, or will come through refugee support groups and night shelters. There are of course students and professional people who have migrated to the UK and are self-sufficient. But many in our local communities are not, and turn to the Church seeking help and support, sometimes as a last resort.

This book is designed to help church leaders equip themselves to respond to the challenges of leading and shaping a multicultural congregation. It may also help leaders of other Christian organizations, such as colleges and parachurch organizations, navigate with greater confidence and wisdom the changing face of Christianity in Britain. If you have spent any time in a multicultural congregation you will know that it can be both the best of places and the worst of places. It can be a place of celebration, bursting with cultural expressions in dress, food and music, with insights into Scripture and wisdom as to how to resolve problems in church life that you would never have known and an anticipation of the kingdom to come in all its fullness. However it can also be a frustrating place, where trying to please everyone leads to no one being happy and issues of prejudice are never far away.

The shape of this book

The book is in two parts. The first part aims to lay foundations upon which we will build as we go. Chapters 2 and 3 attempt to construct a biblical worldview that will help us as we think about multicultural church, Chapter 2 exploring the Old Testament (OT) and Chapter 3 the New Testament (NT). They will show how the assimilationist approach of the Israelites in the OT gives way to an integrative approach in the NT, allowing

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least three ways in which this book will prove to be very helpful. First, its contents are reflective of an author who has listened to his congregations before putting pen to paper. Based on his listening, Malcolm Patten has developed helpful theories and strategies to enable church leaders to begin to address some of the obstacles that may prevent a church from becoming a genuine multicultural community. It is a book laden with practical advice and wisdom from an experienced pastor and it will be a supportive friend to any church leader committed to developing a culturally just church.

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