Clarion Review

Religion

Astoundingly Joyful, Amazingly Simple: The Meta Church: A 21st Century Innovation with a 1st Century Foundation!

Timothy D. White
AuthorHouse
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Four Stars (out of Five)

The Rev. Dr. Timothy D. White's book is so much more than the story of the creation of the Washington Cathedral, a "meta church" founded by White in 1984, in Redmond, Washington, modeled after the nature of the early church as described in the biblical book of Acts. It is also the description of the love of Christ in action in the world. The goal of those who created the Washington Cathedral was to make something that would be "the greatest caring network the world has ever seen," and what makes White's book so exciting is that it gives testimony that they may well be succeeding.

One of the meanings of the Greek term "meta" is "beyond" or "transcending." The term "meta church," as applied to the Washington Cathedral, refers to a "complex group of living organizations grouped together as a nonhierarchical church where decentralization of power and innovation are essential. The church organization takes the form God allows it to take within the culture in which it finds its context. Its focus is on the evolving organism of the church rather than the organization of an institution."

That evolving organism is comprised of culturally varied congregations, or "Tiny Little Churches," whose very differences are cause for celebration, sharing, and growth. These small groups are part of what could be described as a large "family," whose unique members are united by a shared desire: to act as the heart and hands of Jesus Christ in the world. To that end, the church has also developed five nonprofit organizations that minister to the local community and the larger world.

Collaborative, non-hierarchical, and non-manipulative, Washington Cathedral and its constituent members focus on helping people experience what it is like to live in the Kingdom of God here on Earth, whether or not they ever become church members, and regardless of their

ability to reciprocate. The church has grown from almost nothing into an amazing organization, which hosts two sanctuaries, a state-of-the-art Sunday school, regular free medical clinics for the community, a psychiatric counseling center, a free enterprise business ministry, and many other amenities and services.

White, who holds a Doctor of Divinity degree from Fuller Theological Seminary, writes with clarity and passion. He engagingly relates the “astoundingly joyful and amazingly simple” as well as the “surprisingly painful and amazingly complex” events that occurred as he and his colleagues brought to life their radical and transformative vision of what a church can be in the twenty-first century.

Errors in word usage, such as “your” instead of “you’re,” and “simplistic”—a somewhat pejorative term—where “simple” is intended, appear infrequently. There are also occasional misspellings, as when the name “Barnabas” is given as “Barnabus,” and in a photo caption where “Sprit” should be “Spirit.” More serious are errors that lead to confusion, as in the convoluted sentence, “Coptic churches with a great relationship with Muslim groups, even though they are persecuted by them.”

Overall, the book is an amazing and powerful statement of why and how White can confidently declare that “the church is the greatest hope for the world.”

Kristine Morris