

Editor's Note

Let me ask my fellow white readers a question: do you think of yourself as "white"? If not, may I suggest that you are racially insensitive?

Now a question for any African American readers: to what extent does "blackness" define the way you think of yourself? To whatever extent it does, may I suggest that your thinking is impeding reconciliation?

And a question for any Asian or Hispanic readers: to what extent does race shape your identity? If it doesn't, is that because of acculturation, assimilation, or alienation?

I'm no Luke Skywalker, but in my thinking about ethnicity and race Thabiti Anyabwile is my Yoda. He's pushed me in the directions conveyed by these three questions, which is why this issue of the 9Marks eJournal begins and ends with the sophisticated analysis of Master Anyabwile. The "Conversation Starts with Earth, Wind and Fire" in my email exchange with him. The conversation ends and turns in an exciting new direction in our saving-the-best-for-last piece, Anyabwile's "Many Ethnicities, One Race."

To summarize, Pastor Anyabwile argues that the Christian call for "racial reconciliation" is, ironically, self-defeating, because there is no such thing as different "races." To continue even *thinking as if* there are different races requiring reconciliation is to keep people from being fully reconciled. True reconciliation begins when we recognize that we all belong to one race in Adam and, if we are Christians, to one new race—the people of God in Christ. What this means

practically in the church, however, is being *not less* aware of different skin colors, but *more!*

In between these two contributions a number of brothers pour their hearts out. Let me encourage my fellow Whites to listen earnestly to the different voices in the "Are Whites Missing It?" forum. Do we have ears to hear? Some of the same questions about insensitivity and ignorance are raised in the excellent book reviews from Armstrong, Carter, Chang, Jones, Redmond, Sanchez, and Yong.

Also, Sam Lam observes the myth of "color blindness." John Piper asks a provocative question with provocative ramifications. And the D. A. Carson reprint from his book *Love in Hard Places* offers a good primer for the entire conversation.

Here's one more question for everyone: do you think the question of race is a big deal? It's worth observing that one of the Bible books we most associate with the gospel of justification by faith—Galatians—finds its launching point in Paul's opposition to a form of racism—Judaizing. Some said you have to be Jewish to be saved. Wrong, Paul said. Racism or anything close to it is anti-gospel. John Folmar, the pastor of a church with over fifty nationalities in one of the hardest neighborhoods *on the planet*, shows us how the gospel alone has the power to demolish the worst strongholds.

On behalf of 9Marks, let me say how deeply grateful we are to each of the brothers who have talked about race in this issue of the 9Marks eJournal, each one of them doing so freely and lovingly. God be praised for the reconciliation we share and enjoy in Christ.

--Jonathan Leeman

IS THERE A RACE PROBLEM?



Starting the Conversation with Earth, Wind, and Fire

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A casual email exchange between *Thabiti Anyabwile* and *Jonathan Leeman* on a few of the Black and White issues of life.

A Pastors' and Theologians' Forum

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We asked a roundtable of pastors and theologians whether there is a race problem in the American church and, if so, whether Whites are missing it?

Answers from *Rickey Armstrong*, *Anthony Carter*, *J. D. Greear*, *Sam Lam*, *Eric C. Redmond*, *Juan R. Sanchez Jr.*, *Kevin L. Smith*, *Ed Stetzer*, *Justin Taylor*, *David Wells*, & *Jeremy Yong*



Nine Lessons I Learned From *Yellow* (And One More)

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The author interacts with a secular Asian American professor and comes up with some good lessons for pastors.

By *Sam Lam*



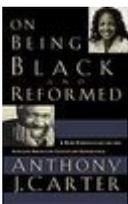
Did Moses Marry a Black Woman?

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A biblical view of interracial marriage and why it matters for the local church to take a stand.

By *John Piper*

REFLECTIONS ON THE PROBLEM

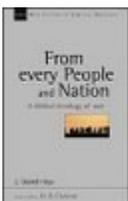


Book Review:

On Being Black and Reformed
by *Anthony J. Carter*

Reviewed by *Rickey Armstrong*

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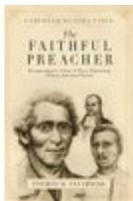


Book Review:

From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race
by *J. Daniel Hays*

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Book Review:

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The Faithful Preacher: Recapturing the Vision of Three Pioneering African-American Pastors

by Thabiti Anyabwile

Reviewed by Ken Jones



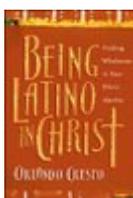
Book Review:

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Reconciliation Blues: A Black Evangelical's Inside View of White Christianity

by Edward Gilbreath

Reviewed by Eric C. Redmond



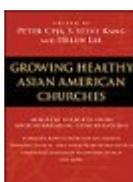
Book Review:

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Being Latino in Christ: Finding Wholeness in Your Ethnic Identity

by Orlando Crespo

Reviewed by Juan R. Sanchez Jr.



Book Review:

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Growing Healthy Asian American Churches

edited by Peter Cha, S. Steve Kang, and Helen Lee

Reviewed by Jeremy Yong and Geoffrey Chang



Five Steps for Racial Reconciliation on Sunday at 11 a.m.

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Here's an extended consideration of the historical, moral, sociological, cultural, biblical and theological dimensions of why our churches don't display the reconciliation Christ has won.

By D. A. Carson

OVERCOMING THE PROBLEM



Pastoring a Multi-Ethnic Church

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A pastor in one of the world's most difficult neighborhoods reflects on challenges and opportunities of having a multi-ethnic church.

By John Folmar



Many Ethnicities, One Race

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If the church wants to better embody the reconciliation Christ achieved on the cross, it must begin thinking about race in a whole new way.

By Thabiti Anyabwile

AUDIO—LEADERSHIP INTERVIEWS

Above All Earthly Pow'rs with David Wells

posted 8/1/2007 at www.9marks.org; click on "audio"

Mark Dever asks David Wells about going against culture, contextualization, postmodernism, how to do theology as preachers, urban ministry, and more. You'll want to listen several times.

Life and Ministry with Mark Dever

posts 9/1/2007 at www.9marks.org; click on "audio"

The tables turn as C.J. Mahaney puts Mark Dever in the hot seat and interviews him.

9MARKS EVENTS THIS FALL

(for more information on conferences below, go to www.9marks.org and click on "events" tab)

"Theology for All": Annual Day Conference

London, England

9/22/2007

Mark Dever

Building Healthy Churches at East London Tabernacle Baptist Church

London, England

9/24/2007

Mark Dever and Mike Gilbert-Smith

NANC Annual Conference

Fort Worth, TX

10/1/2007 - 10/2/2007

Mark Dever

Building Healthy Churches at The Northbrook Conference

Cedar Rapids, IA

10/8/2007 - 10/9/2007

Matt Schmucker and Jonathan Leeman

Ready for Reformation? at Reformation Truth Ministries 2007 Pastors' Conference

Durham, NC

10/12/2007 - 10/13/2007

Matt Schmucker

Building Healthy Churches at Missouri Baptist Annual Pastor's Conference
Osage Beach, MO
10/29/2007
Mark Dever, Matt Schmucker, and Jonathan Leeman

Gospel Growth vs. Church Growth with Matthias Media
Washington, DC
10/30/2007 - 11/1/2007
Mark Dever

John Reed Miller Lectures
Jackson, MS
11/6/2007 - 11/8/2007
Mark Dever

Building Healthy Churches
Jackson, MS
11/9/2007 - 11/10/2007
Mark Dever, Ligon Duncan, Matt Schmucker, and Jonathan Leeman

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Starting the Conversation with Earth, Wind, and Fire

An email exchange between Thabiti Anyabwile and Jonathan Leeman

From: Jonathan Leeman
Sent: Tuesday, August 22, 2006 10:56 AM
To: Thabiti
Subject: RE: Book recommendations



Hey, I bought Earth, Wind, and Fire's greatest hits. Man, that's good stuff! At least the music. I can't always understand what they're saying. Did you ever listen to them?

From: Thabiti
Sent: Tuesday, August 22, 2006 11:16 AM
To: Jonathan Leeman
Subject: RE: Book recommendations



Did I ever listen to them?! You kiddin', right? ;-) Man, that's one of the first and greatest bands of that generation. They played forever, and I'm surprised their "greatest hits" is one CD. If so, you got robbed! But in any case, that's classic stuff. They set the standard for a long time. When I think of Saturday morning chores around the house, or "blue light parties" (let me know if I need to explain that for you ;-)), The Elements are the folks that come to mind. Enjoy that piece of African Americana.

T-

From: Jonathan Leeman
Sent: Tuesday, August 22, 2006 11:21 AM
To: 'Thabiti'
Subject: RE: Book recommendations

I hate to ask: what's a blue light party?

From: Thabiti
Sent: Tuesday, August 22, 2006 11:58 AM
To: 'Jonathan Leeman'
Subject: RE: Book recommendations

"I would not have you ignorant, brother." ☺

A blue light party is a house party where the regular light bulbs are exchanged with a blue light bulb that sets the mood by casting a blue hue over things. It basically gave enough light that you could see somewhat, but enough darkness that you had to guess what you were seeing or hide what you were doing. Add a string of beads hanging in the doorway, some afros, and those cheesy velvet paintings, and you're in the 70s of my childhood, brother!

T-

From: Jonathan Leeman
Sent: Tuesday, August 22, 2006 12:35 PM
To: 'Thabiti'
Subject: RE: Book recommendations

Wow. I wanna go and see. Sometimes, I really wish we had time machines. I'll encounter some cultural artifact and find myself longing to experience it first hand.

All the Presidents' Men made me want to experience the Nixon era. *Forest Gump* made me want to experience the transition from the fifties to the eighties. I took a Native American literature class in college. What would it have been like to grow up in a Native American tribe in Montana? Their literature and poetry gave me a taste. But not enough. I found myself wanting more.

Likewise, Listening to the "Elements" cd and looking at the pictures inside gave me a taste that made me want to go back and experience some of what you described. I don't want the sinful bits that you seem to be alluding to. But I do want to experience the human element of it all. Honestly, Thabiti, seventies black culture can feel as distant and otherworldly to me as native American culture (even though I was born in 73). What was it like? How did it feel?

On a number of occasions I have spent time with older African American folk—probably your grandparents age. I think of Margaret Roy at Capitol Hill Baptist. Was she around when you showed up? I'd sit in her living room and speak about the Lord with her. Man, she radiated joy in a way that you just don't see in older white folk. In those conversations, I'd get a taste of a culture and generation that seems to have largely passed, but one that I wanted to know. (Is it possible that many in her generation, even if not theologically trained, knew an intimacy with the Lord born of hardship and oppression? I can only speculate). Hip hop culture *feels* about as far removed from Margaret Roy's culture as I am from Native American—even though it's easy to recognize the organic links and common roots to each.

Whenever I left her house, I would always think to myself, "Within the history of America, I know whose going to be first in the kingdom of heaven."

When the kings of the earth bring their glory into the heavenly city (Rev. 21:24), I expect we will get to experience something like time travel and culture hopping. I expect/hope that we'll get to see whatever redemptive, God-given lights shone, by God's common grace, into each of these times and eras. What do you think: will something of the Elements groovy funk be heard there?

Your brother in him,

Jonathan

From: Thabiti
Sent: Tuesday, August 22, 2006 1:04 PM
To: 'Jonathan Leeman'
Subject: RE: Book recommendations

Boy! You make us want to go back to these times and places too!

"What was it like? How did it feel?" To be black in the 70s.... Man... that's like asking a fish what wet feels like (you know that saying/proverb?). He can't tell you. It's all he's ever known. You have to ask the amphibians what "wet" feels like, someone that's been in and out of the water and knows the feeling of both. I'm afraid black is the only skin I've been in and it's a darn deep skin to try and climb through. And *feeling* black is a tremendously powerful thing. It is at once the proudest feeling you can sometimes imagine and simultaneously the most dangerous feeling. It's strange really. So much of what it *feels* like to be black comes from outside yourself, assumes things about blackness that are foreign to you, and is vested with intensity and emotion you don't always understand. So 70s black culture was as much about "funk" as you pointed out as defiance and negotiation of an identity amidst a lot of social change. I mean, for me, the question was, "Am I to be cool and funky (Parliament Funkadelic, Bootsy Collins, The Elements, etc) or am I to be Shaft, Superfly, and Foxy Brown?" And how am I to tease out the "sinful bits," the counterproductive bits, from the bits that reinforce and direct in some positive way?" None of these questions were being directed (humanly speaking) to or by Christ in any way that I can recall. And all of the questions simply assumed themselves to be some intrinsic part of "blackness," as ill-defined and changing as that notion was.

And if you can dig this (to use the era's parlance), all of this stuff was happening at the speed of images, man. These weren't explicit philosophical talks we were engaging in. These were the questions we were trying to figure out after watching *Car Wash* or listening to Kool and the Gang or the first generation of rappers like Grand Master Flash & the Furious Five and Kurtis Blow (we seemed to spell all things that should start with "C" with a "K"; I don't know why) and then going to the pool hall to hang out or turning to some homework assignment for school. These were the things that were even shaping how we played basketball of all things! The modern-speak of "who's got game" is little more than the braggadocious individualized smoothness we tried to emulate from one another and develop over and against "white boy ball" with all its structure, precision, and choppiness. That was the politics of black and white identity at work. One called it "game," the other called it—pejoratively—"street ball." We were "being black," whatever that meant and as uncritically as we did it.

What was it like? How did it feel?

I remember when I first found out that the black male was an "endangered species." Whoa! That'll get your attention! Who owns that list? How did I get on it? What endangers me beyond the danger of being black like I've always felt? And—oh my—does the fact that somebody besides me now knows (or at least, admits) that I'm endangered change how "they" are going to respond to me? What will that mean? Do I need the attention? I've already figured out some ways for negotiating these shark-infested, mine-filled waters; what's old and what's new, given this new definition of blackness?

There was the "Crack Epidemic" (read "Black Epidemic" or "Crack Down on Black Users of Crack Epidemic"). Man...the ravaging of entire zip codes that that drug completed! Nothing like it. Even the older folks who had survived "smack" (heroin, another ironic name) were just shocked motionless at the speed and total devastation this drug wrought. Mostly in black neighborhoods, many of which in the 70s had been middle class to lower middle class areas. Blue light house parties turned into crack houses, then into blue light raids as police with "three strikes authority" showed up (happily, in most cases, but pretty late).

The 70s....

We went from being mostly two-parent families where kids knew their daddy (though already on a steep decline) to mostly single-parent families where a significant amount of kids didn't even know dad's name. That happened in just over a decade, brother, mostly through the late 60s and 70s.

Jonathan, honestly, it's CRAZY being a black man!! It's CRAZY.

I wish you could check it out for a day though, man. It's also pretty COOL ;-)

T-

From: Jonathan Leeman
Sent: Tuesday, August 22, 2006 2:14 PM
To: 'Thabiti'
Subject: RE: Book recommendations

Thabiti,

Couple of observations. Three questions.

Observations:

First, I was eating a perfectly ripe peach the other day. The flavor was unbelievable. The only way I can think to describe the flavor is "soft, velvety orange peachness." It didn't taste like a blueberry or a strawberry. It tasted like a peach. There's no analogy for describing that. You can say it's juicy or squishy or whatever. But how do you describe the taste of peachness itself? It caused me to reflect on God's marvelous creativity in creating peachness, and to praise him.

When I encounter different cultures, it can feel something like that. Sometimes I think I'm getting a taste, as when I listen to the Elements. At other times, however, I feel like someone is trying to describe the taste of peachness, but it's as if I have never had a peach. So I can't make the connection. The translation feels impossible. That's a bit what I feel like when you describe being black (or when my wife describes what it's like to be a woman!). No doubt there are clear places of correspondence that the human condition—and the conditions of the fall!—afford us. And no doubt that there's an even more glorious foundation of commonality in our redemption (neither Greek nor Jew, male nor female). At the same time, I've not been black, not even "for a day," as you said. Even from the standpoint of our redemption, the body has many members.

It's humbling, isn't it? It reminds me of my finitude. Can you imagine what God must be like, Thabiti? How diverse and "colorful" and multi-flavored and resplendent? O brother, what must it be like to be in his presence? To talk with him? To enjoy him?

Back to peaches: I want to praise God for the peach. And I want to praise God for the strawberry. And I want to praise God for the blueberry. Each—marvelous flavors!

With human beings, of course, it's not so simple. You have to extract the good from the bad, the light from the dark, the clean from the unclean, the pure from the impure. (Isn't this what God is trying to teach the Israelites with those strange food laws?)

Second observation: in Miroslav Volf's *Exclusion and Embrace*, he talks about how humans form their identities through the very things they oppose. He grew up as a Croat in former Yugoslavia, and watched as Serb soldiers decimated their towns, families, etc. But even as the Croats hated the Serbs and the Serbs hated the Croats, they were defining themselves through the other. Whatever the "other" was, they weren't. (In high school, I came to the same conclusion about punk rockers. Don't tell McKinley.)

At the same time, I wonder if that's *more true* for minorities than it is for majorities. Between Serbs and Croats, there's something of a parity (though I suppose it depends on what region you're in). Between blacks and whites in the history of the United States, there hasn't been. There has been a clear power hierarchy. So growing up, I never thought of myself as "white." It wasn't until I taught the second grade in a Washington DC public school for a year and was one of two or three whites in the entire school that I began to think in those terms. At the same time, when I left that school, and through the course of my days now, I don't really ever think in terms of "being white" in the way that you describe for yourself. I called this my second observation. I guess I really have a question: would you say that's a fair assessment? In other words, have you found that African Americans are more inclined to think in terms of "being black" than white Americans are inclined to think in terms of "being white"? If so, does that bespeak a woeful ignorance on our part?

Now for my three (further) questions:

First, *when* were "they" saying being a black male was an endangered species? *Why* were they saying that?

Second, would you agree with the distinction I made between Margaret Roy's generation and the hip hop generation? Is there a dramatic difference (I suppose there is in culture at large)? Are there many remnants of her God-fearing, Bible-believing, joy-in-Jesus generation left?

Third, what are your thoughts about my feeling like you're describing peachness even though I've never eaten a peach? Is the experience untranslatable? Is there hope for understanding? What? How? What's the best book I can read to help me know *what it's like to be you*?

Grateful for you, my brother of a different mother (but the same Father!!!),

Jonathan

From: Thabiti
Sent: Wednesday, August 23, 2006 11:05 AM
To: 'Jonathan Leeman'
Subject: RE: Book recommendations

You wrote: *"In other words, have you found that African Americans are more inclined to think in terms of "being black" than white Americans are inclined to think in terms of "being white"? If so, does that bespeak a woeful ignorance on our part?"*

Yep and yep.

You wrote: *"First, when were they saying being a black male was an endangered species? Why were they saying that?"*

That was the major slogan, phrase, rallying cry throughout the 1980s. It was a provocative way—used a little by the media but mostly by black leaders and politicians—to describe the serious condition of African-American males. The favorite statistic was "1 out of 4 black men are either in prison, on drugs or dead by the time they're 25." That's an extraordinary statistic! There are problems with this stat, but it did point to the three major social/political issues getting a lot of attention—high incarceration, drug addiction, and violent crime/murder rates. Add to that the then-astronomical black male unemployment rate and you had yourself "an endangered species."

You wrote: *"Second, would you agree with the distinction I made between Margaret Roy's generation and the hip hop generation? Is there a dramatic difference (I suppose there is in culture at large)? Are there many remnants of her God-fearing, Bible-believing, joy-in-Jesus generation left?"*

I think certainly there is a broad distinction to be drawn between Mrs. Roy's generation and today's. First of all, today's generation is with the first or second generation of African American young people that grew up largely unchurched. That was more or less unheard of until the 1970s. Black church attendance was quite high historically, even if it was in many cases nominalism at work. But there are still folks of her generation around with the kind of joy you talk about. And honestly, that kind of faith I think is far greater and stronger than my own. My grandmother would sit on the porch and talk with Jesus. She'd hum to Him ("because the devil doesn't know what you're saying if you hum"). And she found a tremendous joy in the Lord ("The joy of the Lord is my strength") when she reflected on her hardships, etc. I think that's still alive with folks who have a fairly experiential approach to the faith and folks who have been bolstered through great hardship by faith in the Lord. But today is about "CEO pastors" and "empowerment" and "prosperity" in a way that was hardly true two generations ago.

You wrote: *"Third, what are your thoughts about my feeling like you're describing peachness even though I've never eaten a peach? Is the experience untranslatable? Is there hope for understanding? What? How? What's the best book I can read to help me know what it's like to be you?"*

Hmmm.... Well, I guess at some point something enticed you to eat a peach before you knew what peachness tasted like. Maybe it was the look of the thing, or it's smell, or the flavorful report of a friend. Those are aspects of peachness as well, and I think they're pretty accessible even if you've never actually sank your teeth into the thing itself. Those are not less real or less meaningful ways of experiencing a peach, though they're not the essence of the thing either. And those things (smell, touch, sight, reports) are ways of understanding; they transmit useful information. Enjoy those things if that's your interest. Enjoy them unapologetically! Rejoice in the goodness that's found there. And do it all the while enjoying the fact that God has made you Jonathan! Don't worry so much about what's beyond your grasp—especially if it means you don't bother to lay hold of what's *in* your grasp!

And finally, if you want to know what it's like to be me: (a) don't make me a mythical "me" that is somehow the archetype of all other folks who look like me, and (b) do the slow and steady work of getting to know me. Questions and listening are better than books, in my opinion. Books can be helpful, especially for broad trends and basic facts. But when it comes down to it, when you're witnessing to an African-American or trying to strike up a friendship, you're not sitting across the table talking to a book. You're talking to a person. If you enter it that way, while not denying the real differences, you'll find yourself more successful and getting hints of peachness, and you'll be better liked by the peaches who won't mind so much your coming by from time to time and catching a whiff. ;-)

How did this exchange start? You asked me a question, and then I was somewhere back in small town North Carolina enjoying a blue light party! That's how you taste a peach in my opinion.

Grace and peace,

Thabiti

From: Jonathan Leeman
Sent: Wednesday, August 29, 2006 9:36 AM
To: Thabiti
Subject: RE: Book recommendations

You wrote: *"do the slow and steady work of getting to know me."*

Rightee-o. I'd love to.

Earlier you said it was CRAZY, all caps, that is, to be a black man. Why? At least in your own experience?

I have to admit that I would not personally say that it's crazy being white, either in all caps or lower-cased. In the last email, you graciously suggested—"yep"—that it bespoke a woeful ignorance on my part not to identify myself as being white. What would it mean for me to overcome my ignorance? In other words, how would I go about thinking of myself as "white" in a way that's societal health-giving and, more important, Christ-imaging?

(And at some point, Thabiti, I would be grateful if you could help me understand when it's appropriate to say "black" and when it's appropriate to say "African-American." Is a white guy who's emigrated from Africa African-American?)

Grateful for you, brother,

Jonathan

From: Thabiti
Sent: Wednesday, August 29
To: 'Jonathan Leeman'
Subject: RE: Book recommendations

Have you ever read Grace Elizabeth Hale's *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* or Withrop Jordan's *White Over Black: American Attitudes Toward the Negro, 1550-1812*?

Why is it CRAZY to be a black man?

Well... for starters there is the great fear and distrust associated not just with blackness, but with black maleness. Have you every thought about how many people fear you because of the skin you're in? Sometimes it seems the fear is universal. And consider what people do when fear grips them. It's "fight or flight." Can you imagine constantly provoking those extremes in nearly everyone you meet? Can you imagine how tenuous every interaction becomes? And can you imagine how difficult it is to always maintain a balanced, patient accommodation of *every body else's* ignorance? So, many black men check out. They'd rather renounce society than negotiate it. It's like trying to cross a land mine with snow shoes. You need to be able to monitor your steps, move with precision and gentleness, yet what you're dealt are a pair of clumsy, huge bomb seekers for feet! Then others capitulate and wear a mask that makes it easier on some level, but dangerous psychologically. It's crazy.

And, brother, the mistrust shown black men isn't limited to folks outside the black community. Black folks are suspicious of black folks, too. So, the mistrust remains high... in male-female relationships... in walks through the neighborhood... etc. There seems to be no respite from being a black man. That's crazy.

Never mind the other stereotypes. Phenomenal athlete... great dancer... sexual predator... intellectually inferior... and on and on. It's crazy. And nearly all of these things crash upon you from the start, from outside of you, before you can even say "hello." It's crazy.

You asked: *What would it mean for me to overcome my ignorance? In other words, how would I go about thinking of myself as "white" in a way that's societally health-giving and, more importantly, Christ imaging?*

Oooh. I don't completely know. My hunch is we have to do the customary things for overcoming ignorance. Question our presuppositions, listen to others, read, pray, etc. But again, I think that's slow, patient work. Perhaps simply starting to think of yourself as white would be helpful. That suggests, at least, that your experience is not normative and universal. It's more local than that, and it, therefore, needs to be inspected and put in dialogue with other perspectives without assuming either its normalcy or its superiority.

You asked: *And at some point, Thabiti, I would be grateful if you could help me understand when it's appropriate to say "black" and when it's appropriate to say "African-American." Is a white guy who's emigrated from Africa African-American?*

My quick response... say whatever you want whenever you want. But usually, say what the other person respects or identifies with. Think of it as ethnicity. We don't refer to all Arab peoples by one label when we know the ethnicity they own. So, Lebanese are Lebanese not Arabs or Middle Easterners once we know something about them. Same would be true of Ibo, Hausa, Tutsi, Xhosa, etc. All are Africans, but they identify by these ethnic distinctives. So, when someone wants to be called "Black," call them "Black". "Negro," Negro. Etc. Don't be uptight. Once someone offers their choice, use it with them. And "yes," a white guy from Africa is in a technical sense an "African American" if they have American citizenship. It's not the typical usage, but it's legitimate.

Now... a question for you. Why do you suppose you never think about being white? And what do you think are the advantages and disadvantages of not doing so?

With Christ's love,

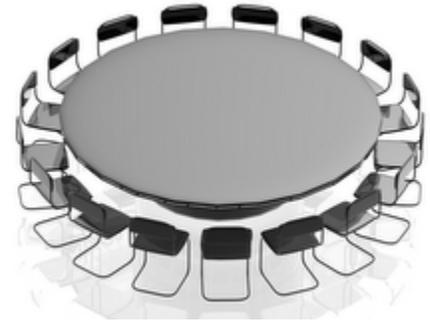
Thabiti

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Pastors' and Theologians' Forum on Race

We asked a roundtable of pastors and theologians the following questions:



In *From Every People and Every Nation*, J. Daniel Hays writes, "Black scholars identify the racial division in the church as one of the most central problems for contemporary [church], while many White Scholars are saying, 'What problem?'" (17). Is there a race problem in the American church? Are whites missing it? Why? What implications does this have for the church's proclamation of the gospel?

Answers from

- Rickey Armstrong
- Anthony Carter
- J. D. Greear
- Sam Lam
- Eric C. Redmond
- Juan R. Sanchez Jr.
- Kevin L. Smith
- Ed Stetzer
- Justin Taylor
- David Wells
- Jeremy Yong

Rickey Armstrong

"Is there a race problem in the American Church?" I must answer by saying obviously yes. Growing up in a nation where everything has been divided by the color of a person's skin has made it impossible for the American Church to escape the negative effects of racism. In 1993 Billy Graham pronounced that "racism, both in the world and in the church is one of the greatest barriers to world evangelization." [1] In 2001 Michael Emerson and Christian Smith brilliantly documents the racial problem in the church. We hinder racial healing when we fail to acknowledge the reality of racism in our churches.



"Are Whites missing it?" While most of our white evangelical brethren are "missing it", praise God that some like Dr. Daniel Hays and Dr. John Piper are getting it. As a result of the Fall we all have our blind spots regarding the race issue.

There are a number of reasons why many white Christians continue to miss the race problem.

1. Given the history of America many Whites have been conditioned to deny the existence of racial problems.
2. Most Whites do not have to live in an environment controlled by minorities.
3. Some view racism as primarily an individual issue as opposed to a corporate problem. Most Whites fail to address the institutional nature of racism.
4. Most Whites are not aware of the various ways that culture is used as a tool of racism.
5. Most white pastors and ministers have refused to address the race problem biblically or otherwise.
6. Many white evangelicals are more loyal to their culture than they are to the Gospel.

What implications does this have for the proclamation of the gospel? I would offer several:

1. The spread of the gospel will continue to be hindered by the sin of racism. We are quick to declare the Scriptures to be the final court of appeal for what we believe and practice, but there is a noticeable inconsistency between our rhetoric and our behavior. We have muzzled the gospel so that it can fit within our cultural, racial and religious traditions.
2. The world's depiction of evangelicals as segregationists is justifiable as long as we continue to be silent on racial issues.
3. False expressions of Christianity as well as other false teachings (Prosperity teachings, Charismatic madness, Black Muslim religion etc.) will continue to make significant inroads into our inner city and minority communities apart from a serious biblical, interracial, cross-cultural witness in the evangelical church.
4. Race and culture will continue to dictate how we relate to each other rather than the Scriptures.

1. Billy Graham, *Racism and the Evangelical Church* (Nashville: Christian Life Commission SBC, 1993), pamphlet.

Reverend Rickey Armstrong serves as pastor of Glendale Baptist Church in Miami, Florida where he lives with his wife, Tobi, and their six children.

Anthony Carter



Is there a race problem in the church? Indeed there is. The unfortunate truth is that there is a racial divide in evangelicalism. The issue primarily lies in our inability (particularly our white brothers and sisters) to live according to Philippians 2:3: "in humility count others more significant than yourselves." White privilege makes it difficult and even unnecessary for our white brothers and sisters to submit to those who are not racially or culturally like them. This lack of submission does not necessarily stem from a racist attitude, but it does demonstrate that we do what is most comfortable and causes the least tension in our cultural identifications. It also tends to make talk of racial diversity empty and fruitless.

Most of my white evangelical and Reformed brothers and sisters speak positively and eloquently on racial diversity. For this, I commend them. However, until we see white men and women doing what black men and women have long learned to do—namely, sitting under and submitting to the leadership and authority of those who are ethnically different—we will not see real diversity.

Most of the diversity we presently see is black men and women going to where white people are. Even when predominantly white churches call a black man to be the pastor, it is black people going to where white people are most comfortable. Real diversity will happen when we see white people regularly and joyfully going to where black men lead, preach, and teach. We will see real diversity when white people learn to submit to the minority culture as black people have had to submit to the majority culture.

Mutual submission is an undeniable evidence of the Spirit's work (Phil. 2:3-4). It is particularly evident when the majority learn the worth and joy of submitting to the minority. It demonstrates that they fear God more than men. Where there is no mutual submission, there is no real fear of God. Where there is no real fear of God, there will be no real diversity. God has long given us the solution to the racial problem. Besides a racial problem, however, it appears that we have an obedience problem as well.

Anthony Carter is the assistant pastor of Southwest Christian Fellowship, author of On Being Black and Reformed, and an organizing member of the Council of Reforming Churches.

J. D. Greear



For years, "church growth experts" have maintained that you can grow a church faster if you aim at one particular "slice" of culture, whether a certain demographic, race, age, economic status, and so on. These experts instruct churches to appeal to their target audience by playing the music they like, speaking in their colloquialisms, dressing in their style, and programming ministries for them. Black churches seem to reach black people best. Rockin', laid-back, uber-cool churches reach the twenty-somethings the best. Organized, professional church services reach middle-class America the best. You get the point.

On the other hand, the second chapter of Acts provides us with a picture of a church where people from different races, different ages, and different backgrounds come together under one commonality, Jesus Christ. The church was supposed to be a miraculous sign of Christ's Lordship over his people and a testimony to the culturally-transcendent beauty of Jesus.

It is clear that the early church was diverse in this way. Racial harmony within the churches was one of the things that astounded the Roman world and caused the rapid acceptance of the church in Roman culture (see Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity*). Recently, I heard Bill Hybels say that if he had Willow Creek to do over again, he would have built his church on diversity. I even asked him, point blank, would he do this if it meant reaching half as many people. Without hesitating he said, "Absolutely. The larger, corporate witness of the church is more important than a temporary numbers surge for one congregation."

In order to accomplish that type of diversity, however, you have to program for it. There have to be elements in our services that appeal to other cultures and ages. When ethnic minorities see themselves in leadership, they more easily accept the authenticity of the message. Otherwise, they have a hard time inviting others from their culture to come.

And this is fair. Why should we insist they conform to our culture? Many of us poor white people were silly enough to assume that when we finally announced that black people were welcome in our churches, they would all come flooding back in, thanking their lucky stars for the chance to be in our presence. But why would a black person want to come to a church that doesn't resemble his culture or possess any of his "kind" in leadership?

However, if you start to mix truly "black elements" into your service, some of your white crowd gets uncomfortable and you are less effective at reaching them. By "black elements" I mean things that appeal to people in a *truly* black culture. (To note: I've noticed that some churches who boast of racial diversity have black people who have morphed into white culture. These black people are not recognized by the black culture as being representative. Black culture as a whole is not Victorian, and most black people are not comfortable in a staid, Victorian environment that appeals to the highly educated.)

So, herein lies the dilemma: it seems that the New Testament gives us an ideal of a church that is diverse in every way. But diversity seems to hinder growth. And shouldn't we want to reach people as fast as possible?

So what is the answer?

Perhaps the answer lies in a matrix. I think that the local church ought to have some ministries that are targeted at a homogenous group—certain outreaches, certain small groups, certain special services, where people of one cultural-milieu try to reach people in their same milieu. The gospel penetrates a culture best when it is brought by people from that same culture. Amidst all the multi-ethnic diversity of the church at Pentecost, the apostles *did* begin by speaking in peoples' own language. We can't expect the unbelieving culture to say that cultural differences really don't matter—that would be expecting them to act sanctified before they are even saved!

But on top of that are certain things that the local church must do that celebrate and promote its diversity. Perhaps the weekend service is where various cultures can be displayed in worship. Perhaps that can happen in a special joint service where sister-churches of different ethnicities worship together. In the final analysis, however, we know that cultural diversity must be the end-game for the local church.

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Sam Lam

The issue of race is easier than we think, and it's more complicated than we think.

It's easier than we think because, at its core, the issue of race or ethnicity relates to favoritism, which we read about in James 2. We like people who are similar to us or who can give us what we want.

It's more complicated than we think, though, because favoritism appears in so many ways: from race and ethnicity to socioeconomic to geographical to interests. The challenge is to be aware of how we may be showing favoritism, and often we're not aware that we are.

Since Whites are often in the majority in America, and given the history of racial relations in America, Whites have a special challenge. Though they may be aware that others have race concerns, it may be hard for them to truly grasp the significance



of such issues. Minorities know what it feels to be in a minority position. As a Chinese, I often notice I am different when I walk into a room that is predominantly white. Yet there are not many contexts in the United States where Whites are in the minority. Thus, the cross-cultural awareness that minorities nearly automatically develop must be actively learned by Whites.

What to do? I recommend that we actively seek to grow in serving all members of our churches, spending time with those who are different from us. Through such interactions, I think we will discover how we have blindly shown favoritism. Then as we work through these issues of race, we have the privilege of glorifying God by showing the power of his cross in reconciling all peoples to himself. That is a picture of the gospel—and also a great hope for us.

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Eric C. Redmond



There is a race problem in the American church, if for no other reason than the fact that there is a race problem in America, and the evangelical church's progress on race has, historically, mirrored America's progress on race. The great gulf that exists between the gatherings of Whites and African Americans on Sunday morning, often reflecting the great gulf that exists between white exurbia and African American suburbia or cityscape, exemplifies the mirroring of the culture by the church.

My white brothers of the faith often miss the race problem. I don't feel that this is due to overt racism on the part of many. Instead, it's because my white brothers must *work* at seeing life through the eyes of an African or Hispanic or Asian or Native American—all of whom are *naturally* and *daily* race-conscious. This is inevitable when you are

- the only minority in the board room or on the faculty,
- the one being profiled by security cameras or stereotyped as a class below white cultural and class standards,
- the potential victim of discrimination by mortgage lenders and human resource hiring specialists,
- a parent concerned about his/her child being mistreated as the only minority in a classroom or at a teen camp—even a Christian teen camp.

In addition, unless one works very hard to do so, my white brothers cannot feel what it is like to live in a society dominated by another ethnic culture (in a society in which ethnic distinctions matter greatly) and to adjust to the dominant culture's preferences, norms, and mores daily—from the time one leaves home in the morning until returning home in the evening. This can even be the case at one's church, fraternal organization or civic group. This *practical ignorance* of the minority experience lends itself to omissions of thought—i.e., "insensitivity"—on issues of race. Three examples should suffice to express this reality:

1. In churches that are predominantly white with a small percentage of African Americans or other minorities, little might be said on issues like Supreme Court decisions on race, immigration reform, and the tightening of the U.S.-Mexico border; the continued use of offensive names for professional sports teams; and the use of racial slurs by actors like Michael Richards and Mel Gibson. Yet there are ethnic minority believers in that congregation who need their white brothers and sisters to weep with those who weep, or to encourage them all the more as we [they] see the Day approaching. After all, the ethnic minority has been dealt a blow below the skin. At minimum, the ethnic minority needs someone to ask, "Brother, sister, how do you feel about this issue?" This demonstrates a clothing-in-humility-toward-one-another that is needed to bring unity within the body of Christ.

2. A recently published systematic theology—*A Theology for the Church* (B&H, 2007)—provides the contemporary pastor and layman with a solid work that has the potential to become a standard seminary classroom or personal pastoral reference text for years to come. In this collaborative effort, each chapter on a specific doctrine has three great features: (i) a brief look at the history of the specified doctrine, (ii) a selective summary of Baptist teaching on the doctrine, and (iii) a consideration of the practical implications and outworking of the doctrine in the life of the church.

However, in *Theology* there is not one mention of racism, racial-reconciliation, injustice, slavery, or genocide. (I am aware that the topics included may seem imbalanced since the work is a collaborative effort, drawing from the expertise of several men.) By omitting such discussions in a tome of this type—one that is compiled by some of the most well-known conservative Baptist scholars in this generation—we have, by *de facto*, said that issues related to "race" are not for theological discussions, or at least not a discussion at the level of Openness Theology, Intelligent Design, and the extent of the Atonement. If this text begins to serve our seminaries in a manner similar to Erickson's

and Grudem's systematics, many of our younger men and women will study theology without a critical reference work on race. Apparently, that discussion is left for the African Americans, Hispanics, and Liberation Theologians. This unintentional omission in *Theology* allows for an unintentional omission in the theology coming from our pulpits.

It seems to me that *Theology* would have been a good place to put a nail in the coffin on theological errors related to race. I think this would have had a tremendous effect on the pulpits around the country, and especially in Southern Baptist pulpits, as men grabbed this reference work when preparing sermons on Genesis 10, Ephesians 2, or 2 Corinthians 5, or for topical series on sin, justice, missions, and theological anthropology. As it stands, we are left without a one-stop body of divinity that also discusses race and justice.

Moreover, if "race" is not important enough for the theologians to discuss, it will not be important enough for those who actually believe in (conservative) theology to consider it as part of their theology.

The question has to be asked, why are topics concerning race not a part of normal, essential theological discourse? Why is it not natural for them to appear in a bound systematic volume written by conservative churchmen? I would suggest that it is because "race" is not a natural and daily concern for these brothers; it is not factored into their theological histories and applications.

3. Evangelical seminaries—the training grounds for the leaders of the church—still tend to be overwhelmingly white in administration and faculties. While every evangelical seminary with which I am familiar is working hard to hire ethnic minority faculty and administrators, the fact that few schools have demonstrated the courage, good will, and consistent effort to bring about these changes suggests that the issue is not a top priority for many schools. However, when a school's faculty and administration remains nearly 100 percent white, *in effect* the school communicates that scholarship, teaching leaders, mentoring leaders, and administering a school is for some and not others—that ethnic minorities are not yet equals in this task. This *effect* also sends a message that ethnic minorities may preach the gospel, but (re)searching and teaching the depths of the historical and theological deductions from the gospel in a formal academic and scholastic manner is beyond them. Thus, white brothers can view ethnic minorities and their churches as second-tier in their understanding and articulation of the gospel. In fact, when an African American or another ethnic minority speaks in seminary chapel only once or twice a year, ethnic minority students feel that they are being viewed as second-tier by fellow white students. This then leads African Americans to discourage younger generations of men in their churches from going to such schools. It also creates feelings that such schools are racially *biased* when a school's administration may simply be *omitting* what does not come naturally to them.

I believe the Church is the only entity on earth that has the power to overcome the social display of sins (and the sins themselves!) related to the racial divide in the church, racial insensitivity, racism, racial discrimination, racial injustice, the racialization of American society, and genocide. Only the gospel of the Savior of the whole world, the righteous Judge of all the earth, the one who looks at the heart and not the outward appearance of man, the one who has broken down the middle wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles, the one whose kingdom rules over all, and the one who announced to Abraham, "through you all nations shall be blessed," has the power to make people of regenerate hearts one in Christ Jesus.

In adhering to this gospel, African Americans and other ethnic minority believers must practice forgiveness, overlook faults in others, and conquer cynicism, which is the private judgment of the motives of others. For even if Whites corrected all of the above omissions and more, I fear that many African American believers would not give true reconciliation a chance. Many are still holding pains, bitterness, and patterns of skepticism left over from an era gone by. Nevertheless, if we do not forgive, we do not understand the gospel.

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Juan R. Sanchez Jr.

I am convinced that the issue of race is a gospel issue which reflects an ignorance, distortion or blatant denial of particular applications of the gospel. In this light, I do believe that racial division is one of the most pressing issues in the American church today because racism, whether by ignorance or by willful intent, strikes at the very heart of the gospel.



If at the heart of the gospel is the message that God is at work in Christ to glorify himself in all the earth by gathering a multi-ethnic assembly from every tribe, nation, people and language, each of whom are created in his image and likeness, then the neglect of this gospel emphasis communicates an incomplete and deficient gospel.

We may understand that blatant racism is sin; however, I fear that certain popular ministry methods unwittingly produce the same "racist" effects. Here are just three areas that come immediately to my mind which require great wisdom and caution in light of the issue of race:

1). **Church Growth and Church Planting** - Methods of church growth and church planting that are grounded on the homogeneity principle undermine the multi-ethnic emphasis of the gospel because the idea that "like attracts like" tends to lead some well-intentioned evangelists, pastors, and church planters to focus on a particular "target" group, which by its very nature excludes those who are not like the "target."

2). **Ethnic Churches** - This raises the fact that the race issue is not only a "white" problem; for as long as we maintain a *need* for White, Black, Hispanic, and Asian churches, we deny the power of the gospel not only to save, but to unite us as one in Christ. I understand the need for ethnic churches due to language barriers, but such churches prove only effective in reaching the first generation. This is one of the great problems facing language ministries and requires much attention.

3). **Church Relocation** - I am sure relocation is warranted on some occasions, but when a church relocates away from a community because of racial transition or with the purpose of moving to a more affluent community, it embraces the very partiality of which Scripture warns (James 2:1-7) and which betrays the gospel.

If the gospel overcomes all barriers—ethnic (Jew/Gentile), social (slave/free) and gender (male/female)—and unites all who believe as one in Christ (Gal. 3:28), then this unity should be reflected in our congregations, our ministries, and our lives. Anything less would be a denial of the gospel in its entirety.

Juan R. Sanchez Jr. is the senior pastor of High Pointe Baptist Church in Austin, Texas.

Kevin L. Smith



Is there a "race problem" in the American church? OF COURSE! Christians in this country are affected by the ills of our culture unless we pursue godly living that contradicts the surrounding peer influences. Thus far in our nation's history, Christian churches (as a whole) have failed to be sanctified in their understanding of racial and ethnic differences among people, even among fellow Christians. There have been glimpses in American history where the church could have been something greater and godlier. Unfortunately, she failed. As the eighteenth century ended there were noticeable Christian voices crying out against the evil of chattel slavery. Unfortunately, the culture "shouted them down." At the dawning of the twentieth century the Pentecostal revival that began at Azusa Street was a multiracial movement. Sadly, within a decade that union divided over race, with Blacks and Whites taking separate paths. Currently, one only needs to read Edward Gilbreath's *Reconciliation Blues* to understand the present problem of race within the evangelical wing of Christianity.

Are Whites missing it? Yes, many are – not all. Individuals should be considered on their own merits. As a black Southern Baptist, I interact regularly with "clueless" Whites as well as Whites that are very aware of racial issues. When I feel optimistic—I say without oversimplifying—it often depends on what "world" we live in. In Gilbreath's book, a frustrated black woman says, "The White Christians I encounter often display a shocking provincialism – a real naiveté about the world around them. Frankly, it's as if they are stunned to find out that their cultural, political, and religious frame of reference is not the only one" (18). On my bad days, I say white Christians are just like white non-Christians—unwilling to share power and privilege in a competitive, capitalistic society.

Whatever the reason, the costs are eternal! According to John 17:21, the church in America is hindered in its proclamation of the gospel because of our racism and prejudice. Using Hays' language, I would say that is a "central" problem. I appreciate courageous Christians who realize that the original sin of America has also stained the church in America. Has America (and its churches) made progress? Yes, but there is still death in the melting pot. We lament that Christians divorce as much as non-Christians. We likewise should weep that Christian racism parallels that of the non-Christian culture. Sadly, to whom much is given (like the precious glorious gospel), much is required. We fail.

Kevin Smith is an assistant professor of church history at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.

Ed Stetzer

Race matters.

I planted my first church among the urban poor in Buffalo. Having been raised in a racially isolated community near New York City, I never thought much about race—but in Buffalo we had little choice. We were forced to address issues of race because our community was a multicultural milieu. It forced us to read the Scriptures with more awareness of race—and an acknowledgement of its challenges.



We found that race matters in scripture. Even though few Anglo churches seem to notice, Scripture frequently demonstrates God's concern for race and ethnicity.

Luke illustrates the coming of the Spirit with diverse expressions of tongues (Acts 2), even identifying the languages being spoken. And a glimpse of eternity in Revelation shows that men and women from every tongue, tribe, and nation make up the choir of eternal praise (Rev. 7:9). If the writers of Scripture take notice of ethnicity, so should we.

Scripture not only identifies race and ethnicity, but John hints at prejudice concerning Jesus in John 1:46, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Furthermore, Jesus intentionally offends ethnic and racial sensibilities with both the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4) and the Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10). Why go to so much trouble to emphasize their ethnicity if it does not matter?

Yet the same Spirit that inspired the Scripture to identify race also provides the strength to overcome its challenges. Both our worship and our witness are made more perfect when we model gospel-centered diversity.

At the cross, there is "no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female." Yet at the throne there are men and women from "every tongue, tribe, and nation." We would do well to remember both.

Ed Stetzer is the Director of LifeWay Research and LifeWay Missiologist in Residence. He is also the author, most recently, of Comeback Churches.

Justin Taylor

It's simply impossible to deny that there is some form of a "race problem in the American church." If a man and woman enter marriage counseling, and one says that there's a problem and the other denies that there's a problem—well, by definition there's a problem! Furthermore, "If one member suffers, all suffer together" (1 Cor. 12:26).



But what is the *nature* of the problem? Does Scripture mandate ethnic diversity within local congregations? Are mono-cultural communities inherently deficient? What caused the divisions we now see? What perpetuates them? What can be done to overcome them? When are generalizations helpful and when are they harmful? What is the relationship between race and culture? What are the principles and parameters of contextualization? Our inability to come to a common mind on these sorts of questions leads to a divided house playing an indistinct bugle, and this lack of gospel unity hinders our gospel witness.

There are a number of reasons for the mixture of anger and apathy that attends consideration of these issues, including selfishness, self-righteousness, hypersensitivity, insensitivity, assuming the worst in others, love of comfort, and love of power. And despite decades of "dialogue," the church often apes the culture in reversing the maxim of the apostle James, being quick to anger and quick to speak while slow to hear and to listen.

The growing contingent of Reformed black pastors, bloggers, and authors represents a new opportunity for us to search the Word together and to use the resources of our common Reformational heritage. We need our best and brightest pastor-theologians engaging these issues, searching the Scriptures, and communicating the truth with "brokenhearted boldness" (to borrow a phrase from John Piper). Genuine progress can be made if we (i) agree that no questions are off the table; (ii) commit to conversation for the long haul; (iii) assume the best in each other; (iv) seek to ground all of our points in the Word; (v) humbly seek correction and biblically practice the correction of others; (vi) refuse to seek either power or atonement in anything other than the cross of Jesus Christ.

Justin Taylor is the managing editor of Crossway's forthcoming ESV Study Bible. He is also the editor of Overcoming Sin and Temptation, an unabridged but more accessible version of John Owen's classics on sin and temptation.

David F. Wells

Antagonism toward other racial groups is one of the ways in which the Fall continues to play itself out in our world today. Are some white churches guilty of this racism? Of course. Who can deny it?



At the same time, racism is something which is very hard to quantify. How many churches are guilty, and to what degree, and with what frequency, is impossible to say. We can say, though, that racism is always wrong and should always be rectified as soon as it is recognized for what it is. In the Book of Acts, we see the first Christian churches coming to terms with this very issue even though ethnic and theological issues were intertwined in that context.

There were Greek-speaking widows who felt that they were being treated as outsiders and not being given a fair shake. This is what minorities often feel and oftentimes with good reason. The widows' concerns were immediately addressed (Acts 6:1-3). And what we also see is how the gospel itself enabled the early Church to overcome its potential for racism. In obedience to Christ (Acts 1:9), it took the gospel to—of all people!—the Samaritans who were religiously deviant and with whom Jews had had uneasy, strained relations for a thousand years. And Peter was also to learn personally how hard it is to go beyond one's own group (Acts 10:9-48).

In this regard, wouldn't it be a wonderful day if we no longer had all White, or all Black, or all Hispanic churches? These churches come about, I know, because of where people live. And yet we do need to be able to find ways of modeling the gospel together, do we not? After all, we come to Christ as *sinners*, not as Whites, Blacks, and Hispanics; and if our union with him does not obliterate our uneasiness with each other, then we discredit the Church, the gospel and, worst of all, Christ himself. That is what is at stake.

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Jeremy Yong

Some people in every church have missed it. I grew up in up in a Chinese American church, and I missed it. If a church has the problem of losing sight of the racial implications of the gospel, we first need to make sure the gospel is actually present. If the gospel is present, we need to think and help others think through how our restored relationships with God through Christ lead to restored relationships with others in Christ; men once hostile to God now call him Father and two once-divided brothers now fellowship because of the blood of the Savior.



For the preacher and his preaching:

- 1. Preach the Word.** The whole counsel of God provides plenty of opportunities to address the fact that in Christ, there is no Jew or Gentile. Seize them.
- 2. Specifically apply the Word.** Specific application (do a Bible study, read a book, meet up with someone of a different culture to talk about the issues, etc.) can help challenge the congregation (and ourselves!) to move from ungodly ethnocentrism and toward a biblical understanding of race and culture.
- 3. Live what we preach.** Three characteristics come to mind: intentionality, grace, and humility. Mark Dever was a model of intentionality as he took time in staff meeting to read and then have us discuss a piece on Asian American leadership (even though I was the only Asian American at the table). Thabiti Anyabwile was a model of grace as he patiently bore with my racial *faux pas* when we were getting to know each other as brothers. Until Christ's kingdom is consummated, we need a hefty dose of humility (for some of us the Lord sticks it through humiliation) to acknowledge that we don't have all the answers and that we need someone to help us. Who's that someone for you?

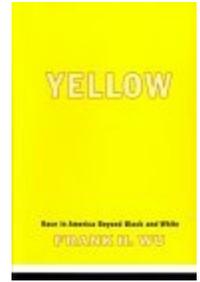
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Nine Lessons I Learned From *Yellow* (And One More) By Sam Lam

An Interaction with Frank Wu's *Yellow* (Basic Books, 2003, 400 pages)



You won't find Frank Wu's book *Yellow* in the Christian section of the bookstore. But if you're a pastor or church leader interested in knowing how to love and serve minorities in your congregation, it may be worth reading.

Wu was the first Asian American law professor at the historically African American Howard University and is a commentator on racial issues. His book *Yellow* looks beyond customary Black-White divisions and considers the role of Asian Americans and other minorities, offering a unique perspective on the topic of race.

In Wu's eyes, no one is color blind. Issues of race affect our thinking, whether we are conscious of it or not. Race is an important issue because we've turned it into an important issue. Given the history of slavery and race-based discriminatory legislation in the United States, the stage has been set for a race-based way of interpreting life. Americans can't just wish this history away.

Whites might not be comfortable with Wu's discussion of "white privilege" and the way he often sides with minorities, but I think he's onto something. All things being equal, being white in America is generally an advantage. Yes, more factors are involved, such as socio-economic discrimination or reverse discrimination by minorities (which is offensive to God). But does discrimination by minorities have as large an impact? Walking with Wu through his own experiences is quite eye-opening.

Along the way, I picked up nine lessons from Wu for thinking about race in our local churches, along with one more lesson.

NINE LESSONS (AND ONE MORE)

First, clothe yourself in the gospel. I'm starting with the "one more" lesson. This is cheating since Wu--probably not a Christian--does not discuss the importance of grace. However, those who have repented of their sins and trusted in Christ should know that our identity is found firstly in Christ. Everything else, like race, ethnicity, even gender, comes further down the list (see Gal. 3:28).

What is more, we should not seek correction for moralistic reasons. We seek racial reconciliation because God has reconciled us to himself and to one another in Christ. We want him to be glorified as his gospel is magnified through the church. The nine lessons which follow are possible outworkings of the gospel in the arena of race.

Second, race is not neutral. Wu states, "[race] shapes every aspect of my life—and everyone else's" (7). Yet he contrasts white Americans, who "can choose to stop thinking about race (or to never start)," with African Americans, who cannot stop thinking in racial terms. It's often easy to think that we have a neutral viewpoint and that our culture is neutral. Yet clear examples in our daily lives demonstrate that this is not the case. For example, Wu argues, African Americans congregating in a group "provides white Americans with another negative visual cue"(320). The converse situation of white Americans meeting together is usually inconspicuous.

What this means in our present cultural context, ironically, is that achieving a colorblind outlook is not necessarily a positive goal. Particular ethnic groups have struggles that are unique to them, and we should not ignore those struggles. Pastors especially should be aware of the struggles of their sheep so that they can better exhort them. Certainly the fundamentals of reconciliation will always be the same: the cross is the ultimate solution for our rebellion against God. Yet the gospel's practical outworkings may differ depending on one's background. For example, perhaps an emphasis on grace to an Asian American coming from a culture prizing duty.

Third, "race is asymmetrical"(10). Wu argues that white Americans may need to assume a greater burden in humility. There is a "false moral equivalence, as if Whites and Blacks as groups actually experience the same racial discrimination on a regular basis" (29). Yes, this is controversial point, but repeated studies show that minorities, especially Blacks, suffer from higher incidences of stress and other health difficulties than Whites.

What does this mean for the pastor? White pastors should be willing to make a greater effort to understand the concerns of minority members in their congregations. This is not because Whites are more guilty of racial offences, but because they possess a more privileged place in society.

I term this the "New York Yankees" syndrome. The Yankees players may not be more arrogant than the players on other baseball teams. But since they enjoy greater financial resources and play on the biggest stage in America, baseball fans impute to them an attitude of pride. In the same way, white pastors have the particular burden (or opportunity!) of working harder to relate with members of their congregation who belong to a minority.

That being said, Asian Americans and other minorities should also be careful about their own attitudes toward each other. Our acts of discrimination are also offensive to God. We are to please him, not society at large.

Fourth, we should be careful of stereotyping races, even positively. For example, a pastor may stereotype Asian Americans as humble due to their relative quietness. But quietness doesn't mean Asian Americans are less proud; they simply manifest their pride differently than Whites or Blacks. Pastors should be aware of differences that may arise due to cultural or ethnic backgrounds, but Scripture should always govern what a pastor finally assumes about every individual human being.

I'm grateful that at my own church, the elders evaluate a man's suitability for pastoral ministry based on his fruit and not on his style. People from different backgrounds will preach differently. But fruitfulness is race-neutral.

Fifth, consider ways that the church can serve members from marginalized groups. Wu argues for affirmative action given the history of race problems in the United States.

Well-meaning Christians may agree or disagree with this stance when it comes to the political arena, but it's good to keep in mind that the fellowship of believers is not "America," and that we are free to consider race-based approaches to address certain issues in our congregations. Given the unequal discrimination that majority and minority members face outside the church, Christians *can* take extra measures to encourage the marginalized.

For example, a black man faces more difficulties than a white man. Wu notes,

Most white Americans need not worry about rampant drug dealing and gun violence in their neighborhoods, false arrests, police brutality, selective prosecution, or the death penalty. Being killed by one of their peers, the leading cause of death for African American young men, is not a major fear for their white cohorts (207).

Under these circumstances, congregations can care particularly for those who are black. Pastors can encourage their churches to make sure black members and visitors feel welcome.

Sixth, the church should combine assimilation and integration, both a melting pot and a multi-culture. Wu observes that the polar extremes of assimilation and diversity both have sub-optimal outcomes. Complete assimilation rejects cultural distinctiveness, while complete diversity rejects an overarching identity and leads to a paralysis.

The church, first and foremost, must be centered around the gospel. That is its primary identity. Paul states that, "here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all" (Col. 3:10).

If a church became more racially diverse, however, it would make sense for its culture to change as well. A church, particularly a congregational one, is defined by its members. If it welcomed members from other cultures and ethnicities, it should feel different. Consider geographical contrasts: the culture of a church in New York City will probably be different from the culture of one in rural Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

How would a change in the culture of a church take place? Here is one idea: members of the church could spend more time with people from different backgrounds. If more Hispanics joined our church, pastors should encourage members to spend time with them and their friends. Members shouldn't restrict themselves only to people who look like themselves.

Seventh, we should spend time in ethnically reverse situations. Wu calls for "a place where people of color can be in the overall majority and hold most of the leadership positions" (324). Typically, when people call for multi-ethnic churches, we assume minorities are to join white-led churches. The converse--Whites joining minority-led churches--is much rarer.

But Christians should be willing to enter situations where people of color are in the majority. Go to a party where the majority is a minority. Better yet, serve where minorities are leading. Cultural nuances will probably be more apparent in such situations. Wu states, "we do not all need to follow the same [cultural] rules. But we all need to have a better understanding of the

multiple sets of rules that are in operation" (329). When pastors learn the rules of another culture, they will be better equipped to love their congregations.

And if you're looking for a new church, consider a church you might not typically think of joining because you would be in the minority.

Eighth, "our familiarity with other races should not lead us to premature self-congratulation" (299). We can have friends of other races yet still be blind to racial issues. Don't assume all your opinions are "sensitive." Be willing to continue learning and avoid complacency.

Ninth, take care with your words, and consider what others are hearing. Consider how you may best love others through your speech. Here are examples of things that are *not* helpful to say:

- "Where are you *really* from?" (79).
- "My, you speak English so well." (80).

Consider what an Asian American hears from either statement. She may be born in America, and be as American as a White from Texas. Yet those statements reinforce her place as an outsider.

In addition, pastors should discourage racial jokes. Jokes which seem benign to the majority can "seem like an endlessly recurring nightmare for the minority" (10). Jokes can be used well and encourage humility. However, racial jokes are in a category increasingly taboo in our society. Pastors should be particularly sensitive to such speech because it generally does not commend the gospel.

And tenth, we should address racial issues with heaven in mind. Wu waxes poetically that, "Americans were idealists once and we can become idealists again" (348). Just as Americans once created a land of the free and home of the brave, he means, so they should also be idealists when it comes to issues of race. As Christians, we have a much greater hope and certainty. First, we know that in heaven, there will be people from every "tribe and language and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9). God will accomplish salvation among all peoples of the earth. Second, the Church in heaven will dwell perfectly in harmony. It will submit perfectly to God as a flawless display of his glory.

With the hope of heaven, we can be freshly motivated to address issues of race here on earth. It should be clear that the culture of this church in heaven will differ from the culture of our churches today. We will probably not sit in pews or wear choir robes. (There may not even be organs!) And the ethnic composition of this final church will be quite different from that of our own. Even now, the majority of the world's Christians is not from North America but is from the global South—South America, Asia, and Africa. Therefore, we should not hold strongly to one culture. Instead, we should welcome and serve those of other backgrounds gladly, knowing that in so doing we will be preparing for our eternal home.

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Did Moses Marry a Black Woman?

By John Piper

A biblical view of interracial marriage and why it matters for the local church to take a stand.

Moses, a Jew, apparently married a black African and was approved by God.

We learn in Numbers that "Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married, for he had married a Cushite woman" (Num. 12:1). A Cushite is from Cush, a region south of Ethiopia, where the people are known for their black skin. We know this because of Jeremiah 13:23: "Can the Ethiopian [the same Hebrew word translated "Cushite" in Numbers 12:1] change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then also you can do good who are accustomed to do evil." Attention is drawn to the difference of the skin of the Cushite people.

In his book *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race*, Daniel Hays writes that Cush "is used regularly to refer to the area south of Egypt, and above the cataracts on the Nile, where a Black African civilization flourished for over two thousand years. Thus it is quite clear that Moses marries a Black African woman" (71).

In response to Miriam's criticism, God does not get angry at Moses; he gets angry at Miriam. The criticism has to do with Moses' marriage and Moses' authority. The most explicit statement relates to the marriage: "Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married, for he had married a Cushite woman." Then God strikes Miriam with leprosy. Why? Consider this possibility. In God's anger at Miriam, Moses' sister, God says in effect, "You like being light-skinned Miriam? I'll make you light-skinned." So we read, "When the cloud removed from over the tent, behold, Miriam was leprous, like snow" (Num. 12:10)

God says not a critical word against Moses for marrying a black Cushite woman. But when Miriam criticizes God's chosen leader for this marriage God strikes her skin with white leprosy. If you ever thought black was a biblical symbol for uncleanness, be careful; a worse white uncleanness could come upon you.

MY PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

To the opposing views on interracial marriage, I would add my own experience. I was a southern teenage racist (by almost any definition). Since I am a sinner still, I do not doubt that elements of it remain in me—to my dismay. For these lingering attitudes and actions I repent.

Racism is a very difficult reality to define. Our pastoral staff has been working on it for years. Presently, we are most closely committed to the definition given several summers ago at the [Presbyterian Church in America annual meeting](#): "Racism is an explicit or implicit belief or practice that qualitatively distinguishes or values one race over other races." That is what I mean when I say I was a racist growing up in Greenville, South Carolina. My attitudes and actions were demeaning and disrespectful toward non-whites. And right at the heart of those attitudes was opposition to interracial marriage.

My mother, who washed my mouth out with soap once for saying, "Shut up!" to my sister, would have washed my mouth out with gasoline if she knew how foul my mouth was racially. She was, under God, the seed of my salvation in more ways than one. When our church voted in 1963 not to admit blacks, when I was seventeen, my mother ushered the black guests at my sister's wedding right into the main sanctuary herself because the ushers wouldn't do it. I was on my way to redemption.

In 1967, Noël and I attended the Urbana Missions Conference. I was a senior at Wheaton. There we heard Warren Webster, a former missionary to Pakistan, answer a student's question: what if your daughter falls in love with a Pakistani while you're on the mission field and wants to marry him? With great forcefulness he said, "The Bible would say, Better a Christian Pakistani than a godless white American!" The impact on us was profound.

Four years later, I wrote a paper for Lewis Smedes in an ethics class at seminary called "The Ethics of Interracial Marriage." For me that was a biblical settling of the matter, and I have not gone back from what I saw there. The Bible does not oppose or forbid interracial marriages. And there are circumstances which, together with biblical principles, make interracial marriage in many cases a positive good.

Now I am a pastor. One quick walk through my church's pictorial directory gives me a rough count of over two hundred non-Anglos. I am sure I missed some. And I am sure the definition of Anglo is so vague that someone will be bothered that I even

tried to count. But the point is this: dozens and dozens of them are children and teenagers and single young men and women. This means very simply that my church needs a clear place to stand on interracial marriage. Church is the most natural and proper place to find a spouse. And they will find each other across racial lines.

THE CHALLENGES AND BLESSINGS OF INTERRACIAL MARRIAGE

Opposition to interracial marriage is one of the deepest roots of racial distance, disrespect, and hostility. Show me one place in the world where interracial or interethnic marriage is frowned upon and yet the two groups still have equal respect and honor and opportunity. I don't think it exists. It won't happen. Why? Because the supposed specter of interracial marriage demands that barrier after barrier must be put up to keep young people from knowing each other and falling in love. They can't fellowship in church youth groups. They can't go to the same schools. They can't belong to the same clubs. They can live in the same neighborhoods. Everybody knows deep down what is at stake here. Intermarriage is at stake.

And as long as we disapprove of it, we will be pushing our children, and therefore ourselves, away from each other. The effect of that is not harmony, not respect, and not equality of opportunity. Where racial intermarriage is disapproved, the culture with money and power will always dominate and always oppress. They will see to it that those who will not make desirable spouses stay in their place and do not have access to what they have access to. If your kids don't make desirable spouses, you don't make desirable neighbors.

And here is a great and sad irony. The very situation of separation and suspicion and distrust and dislike that is brought about (among other things) by the fear of intermarriage, is used to justify the opposition to intermarriage. "It will make life hard for the couple and hard for the kids." "They'll be called half-breeds." It's a catch 22. It's like the army being defeated because there aren't enough troops, and the troops won't sign up because the army's being defeated. Oppose interracial marriage, and you will help create a situation of racial disrespect. And then, since there is a situation of disrespect, it will be prudent to oppose interracial marriage.

Here is where Christ makes the difference. Christ does not call us to a prudent life, but to a God-centered, Christ-exalting, justice-advancing, counter-cultural, risk-taking life of love and courage. Will it be harder to be married to another race, and will it be harder for the kids? Maybe. Maybe not. But since when is that the way a Christian thinks? Life is hard. And the more you love the harder it gets.

It's hard to take a child to the mission field. The risks are huge. It's hard to take a child and move into a mixed neighborhood where he may be teased or ridiculed. It's hard to help a child be a Christian in a secular world where his beliefs are mocked. It's hard to bring children up with standards: "you will not dress like that, and you will not be out that late." It's hard to raise children when dad or mom dies or divorces. And that's a real risk in any marriage. Whoever said that marrying and having children was to be trouble free? It's one of the hardest things in the world. It just happens to be right and rewarding.

Christians are people who move toward need and truth and justice, not toward comfort and security. Life is hard. But God is good. And Christ is strong to help.

There is so much more to say about the challenges and blessings of interracial marriage. Suffice it to say now by way of practical conclusion: At my church, we will not underestimate the challenges of interracial marriage or transracial adoption (they go closely together). We will celebrate the beauty, and we will embrace the burden. Both will be good for us and good for the world and good for the glory of God.

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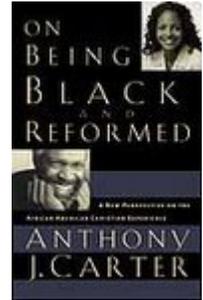


Book Review: *On Being Black and Reformed*, By Anthony J. Carter

Reviewed By Rickey Armstrong

P&R, 2003, 153 pages, \$11.99

The subject of racial healing has been widely discussed in both secular and church arenas since the formation of our nation. Many have grown tired of "addressing racial issues," while others give only predictable and simplistic assessments. Entering this conversation is author and speaker Anthony Carter, who offers a fresh perspective on the African-American experience. Whether your faith is practiced in an African- or Anglo-Christian context, Carter's work should help you in the work of reforming your church and bringing greater visible reconciliation to God's people.



The author aims to answer two basic questions regarding the African-American experience: "Where was God during the Atlantic slave trade and American slavery?" and "How does Christianity triumph among an oppressed people who received their oppression at the hands of a so-called Christian nation?" While members of both black and white communities have asked these questions before, Carter considers them from the perspective of the Reformed faith.

Broadly speaking, Carter views the birth and development of the black church as a testimony to the sovereignty of God, a theme which serves to explain why he believes the Reformed faith is a natural fit for understanding the African-American experience. In addition to the doctrine of God's sovereignty, Carter points to the biblical doctrines of sin and the sufficiency of Christ for explaining how humans can be so cruel to one another and how an oppressed people can embrace the religion of their oppressors.

Carter's ability to answer pertinent historical questions allows him to provide the reader with a well reasoned, historical, and biblical response. It is his contention that we are to understand history helps us understand God and his character. Since God is the mover of the universe, studying history through the lens of Scripture helps us to trace what God is accomplishing.

CHAPTER ONE

Chapter one is devoted to answering a question posed by one of Carter's seminary professors: "Is it necessary to have a black theology?" It's a question that has been raised by many white evangelicals, and suggests that they are unjustifiably suspicious of anything pertaining to the black Christian experience. Carter responds to the professor's question by rephrasing it in such a way that the reader can see what's at stake: "Do we need to understand the African-American experience through a theological perspective that glorifies God and comforts his people?" The answer to this question must be "emphatically" and "unfortunately" "yes" (3)! The answer is *emphatically yes* because of the need to present an alternative to unsound, unbiblical black theological perspectives, like the black theology movement of the 1960s. The church needs a theology that can speak to the African-American experience from a redemptive historical context.

The answer must also be *emphatically yes* because "theology in a cultural context has not only been permissible, but has now become normative." It's the tendency of the majority culture to view its own perspectives as neutral and normative. But no perspective is ultimately neutral or normative. In order to be theologically honest, Carter argues, we need to acknowledge that our theologizing emerges out of a certain context. David Wells seems to do as much when he acknowledges that American theologizing bears distinctly American characteristics (5)

However, Carter answers the question of whether we need to understand the African-American experience through a theological perspective with an *unfortunate yes*. It is unfortunate "because conservative Christians have failed to grapple with issues of African-American history and consciousness, especially in the areas of racism and discrimination." Because of this failure, an African-American perspective on theology is mandatory (6).

CHAPTER TWO

In chapter two, Carter brings three basic biblical truths highlighted by Reformed Christianity to bear on the topic of racial reconciliation: the sovereignty of God, the sinfulness of humans, and the sufficiency of Christ. Carter begins with the picture of

God sovereignly working out his plan in our lives for his glory and our good. Then he points to our need for the Savior by considering the extent of human depravity and the hopelessness of fixing our behavior through the various sociological, economic, or educational remedies (and the philosophies behind them).

Only in Christ is the cure for sin found. In God's gracious forgiveness of us we are provided with the strength to forgive others (Matt. 6:12; Eph. 4:32). As a testimony to this kind of power, the book wonderfully documents many African-Americans responses to oppression that were grounded in the Christian principles of love and forgiveness.

CHAPTERS THREE & FOUR

Chapter three provides a historical response to the question, "How could African-Americans embrace the same Christ that their oppressors professed?" while chapter four answers the inquiry, "Is the black Christian experience incompatible with the reformed tradition?" (46,70). Carter serves the reader well in answering the initial question by tracing God's hand in the building of the African-American church from the onslaught of slavery to the birth of the first African-American churches in 1794 under the leadership of Richard Allen and Absalom Jones. He then helps us witness God's providential hand behind the cruelty of slavery from the founding of the first African-American denomination in 1816 to the present re-Africanization of Christ's bride (Gen. 50:20). In spite of all of their trials, blacks were able to discern the truth of the Christ of Christianity while rejecting the unbiblical practices of misguided Christians.

In chapter four, Carter calls upon all believers to accept the truth that "God's kingdom comprises a diversity of people with a common heritage." He cautions us against racial pride by helping us to understand that "our common heritage is not primarily black, white, or brown, but our heritage is rooted in redemptive history. It is instructive to see that the history of redemption is not black history, white history, African or European history—it is God's history" (63). Carter does his best work in chapter four as he responds to the question, "Is the black Christian experience incompatible with the reformed tradition?" Carter argues against the traditional view that the black experience of Christianity was not compatible with a Reformed faith. He contends that white Christians took such a position because of their support of slavery and that American theology is incomplete if it fails to include the contributions of blacks. A long list of Christian black leaders (the people of Libya and North Africa in Acts 2, Augustine, Athanasius, Jupiter Hammon, Lemuel Haynes, Phillis Wheatley, John Marrant, etc.) are listed as evidence that God is not a respecter of persons when it comes to reaching all nations with the gospel.

CONCLUSION

On Being Black and Reformed is an excellent introduction to the African-American experience from the perspective of redemptive history. Any believer who seeks a greater appreciation of God and his sovereign ways will find the book a valuable read. African-Americans who read this book will be compelled to seek a better grasp of Reformed Christianity, while white Americans who read it will gain a much richer insight into American history and theology. I highly recommend Carter's book.

Reverend Rickey Armstrong serves as pastor of Glendale Baptist Church in Miami, Florida where he lives with his wife, Tobi, and their six children.

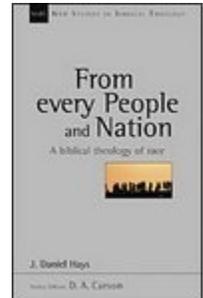
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Book Review: *Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race*, by J. Daniel Hays

Reviewed by Anthony J. Carter

InterVarsity Press, 2003, 240 pages, \$22



Race as a theological category has not had much play in the history of theology. That's what J. Daniel Hays says at the beginning of his book *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race*. This is of particular note given the fact that race has been such a major issue of discussion and contention in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Even though some contemporary systematic theologies have significant chapters on anthropology, few deal directly with the subject of race. Consequently, to write a book on a theology of race sounds foreign to our evangelical ears. But isn't this kind of title and this kind of biblical theological discussion long overdue?

I must admit that when I began to read Hays' book with an eye toward writing a review, I had a few questions. What qualifies someone to write a book on the theology of race? Can a white American write a book on race with the necessary pathos and sympathy to garner credibility from minority readers? Will his majority cultural existence hinder the writer from forthrightly speaking to the issues? Will such a work really find wide acceptance and use in broader evangelicalism?

These are some of the questions I had as I began to read this book. I admit I was skeptical. However, Hays' work more than adequately answered most of my questions. For this I am grateful.

One of the most helpful aspects of the book is that Hays disassociates Ham from the black race and debunks the all too-long held myth of the so-called "curse of Ham."

The curse of Canaan in Genesis 9:18-27, often mislabeled the 'curse of Ham', has absolutely nothing to do with race. The gross misuse of this text to justify slavery or to defend theories of inferiority has done immense damage to the Church in America. Unfortunately, echoes of this misinterpretation can still be heard in the Church today, a distortion of Scripture that is in clear opposition to God's revelation (63).

Hays' discussion of this familiar misinterpretation, given the fact that it's still in print today, is itself enough to make the book worth reading.

But more than that, Hays successfully shows that, as a biblical study, race has much material in the canon of Scripture.

- After the introductory chapter 1, chapter 2 deals with the ethnic make-up of the Old Testament world. The diversity of the nations in the early biblical record is far greater than most of us realize.
- Chapter 3 sets forth the significance of race in the pivotal chapters of Genesis 1-12.
- In chapter 4 Hays discusses how the formation of Israel into a nation, the giving of the law, Israel's interaction with foreigners, and her laws concerning intermarriage relate to a biblical theology of race.
- In chapter 5 Hays shows the interaction the nation of Israel had with black African nations during the years of her monarchy.
- Chapter 6 discusses the issue of race as it is found in the Old Testament prophets.
- In chapter 7 Hays moves the discussion to the New Testament and again shows that the Son of God came into a world apparently as racially and culturally diverse as the United States today.
- In chapter 8 Hays discusses the impact and significant role race plays in Luke-Acts. He gives particular space to Luke's attention to ethnic distinctions.
- In the penultimate chapter 9, Hays examines race in the Pauline corpus and the Apocalypse, and gives special attention to what he considers to be the most important texts on racial equality found in the New Testament. He writes, "Although texts that have implications for racial equality can be found throughout the New Testament, the strongest and clearest texts are found in Galatians, Colossians, Ephesians, and Revelation" (181).

Hays demonstrates that while the topic of race is raised throughout the biblical record, it's *not* used in the sense that we commonly think of race, namely, in categories of superiority and inferiority. Racist thinking has no warrant in Scripture, though some have erroneously used the Bible to justify their racism. Hays does a genuine service to the body of Christ by making this point biblically.

Like most authors on this subject, Hays goes to great lengths to identify and prove the prominence of black Africans in the Bible. And he does an excellent job pointing out that "the trajectory of this Black presence appears in numerous places and plays a significant role in the early story of Israel" (85). Admittedly, this is necessary because of erroneous teachings like the 'curse of Ham.' However, while I commend Hays at this point, it is a reminder to me of the racism that yet remains. A better study may be discovering evidence for the presence of a people who reflect northern European culture in the Old Testament record. Hays makes this point early on when he writes:

In order to tackle the biblical texts that relate to ethnic issues it is critical that scholars, pastors, and parishioners open their eyes to the fact that the people of the biblical world did not look like the people of rural Minnesota (27).

Unfortunately few have really embraced this truth. Instead, the perception has been that there was significant Caucasian involvement in the Scriptures, but very little black African presence. According to Hays,

"This perception is erroneous, and it has fostered disastrous theology within today's White Church that has contributed to the continued, and almost total, division of the North American Church into Black and White" (27).

In the final analysis, Hays shows that, far from being an opportunity for the development of racial and cultural superiority attitudes, race in the Bible shows the desire of God and the power of the gospel to redeem all types of people and to populate the kingdom *from every people and nation*. Hays reminds us that the gospel took root and blossomed and thrived in a culture that was racially and culturally mixed, which demonstrates the gospel's unique ability to bring unity out of diversity by solving the problem that plagues *every race—sin*.

The fact that the kingdom of God has people redeemed "from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and language" (Rev. 7:9) should remind us that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23); and that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself, and has thus entrusted to us the message of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:19). Hays makes this biblically clear. May the church of Jesus Christ today make it practically so.

This book is a fine and needed supplement to the many systematic and biblical theology books we already have on our shelves.

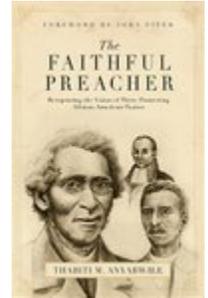
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Book Review: *The Faithful Preacher: Recapturing the Vision of Three Pioneering African-American Pastors*, by Thabiti Anyabwile

Reviewed by Ken Jones



Crossway, 2007, 191 pages, \$15.99

The contemporary preacher has no shortage of resources that remind him of the seriousness of his sacred task—both in and out of the pulpit. There are the standard classics like Spurgeon's *Lectures To My Students*, Baxter's *The Reformed Pastor* (although Baxter's theology was far from reformed), Martyn Lloyd-Jones *On Preaching And Preachers*, William Perkin's *The Art of Prophesying*, and Patrick A. Fairbanks *Pastoral Theology*. In addition to these gems the contemporary preacher has at his disposal great sermons from the past by Martin Luther, John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, and George Whitefield, just to name a few. And if that were not enough, there are a plethora of biographies and books on sermon construction and expository preaching from past and present. In short, today's gospel preacher is a bookstore or mouse-click away from a vast reservoir of material that will expose him to a far different quality of preaching than the drivel and fluff characteristic of so much preaching today.

So with all this material already available, do we really need more biographies and sermons from the past that highlight the difference between good preaching from yesteryear and much modern preaching? Thabiti M. Anyabwile's *The Faithful Preacher* helps us to see that the answer to that question is a resounding "yes."

Anyabwile offers us brief biographies of three African-American preachers and a sampling of their sermons. The fact that African-American preachers are the subject of this book is noteworthy by itself. But unlike much of the work available on the black church or its leaders, this book is more theological than sociological. Many have written about the black church's central role in helping an oppressed people survive and paving the way for the civil rights movement. Those topics are helpful, but they have mostly concentrated on historical and sociological analysis. Not so with *The Faithful Preacher*. Each of the three men profiled were concerned about the social ills of their day and used their particular gifts to aid in the relief of some of those ills, but all their social work aimed at advancing the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Anyabwile introduces the reader to Lemuel Haynes (1753-1833), Daniel A. Payne (1841-1911), and Francis J. Grimké (1850-1937). Haynes was Congregationalist, Payne an African-Methodist Episcopalian, and Grimké a Presbyterian. But from these diverse backgrounds, eras, and denominations a single passion and commitment is revealed: to be faithful preachers of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

At the same time, distinct aspects of the ministry of these godly men stand out. Haynes was not only an avowed Calvinist, he served as the pastor of an all white congregation for over thirty years. Payne was a Methodist-trained minister in a Lutheran seminary engaged in "a lifelong mission to improve the educational condition of his people." He opened his first school in 1829 with three children and three adult slaves for a monthly income of three dollars. Francis Grimké graduated from Princeton Theological Seminary in 1878 under the leadership of Charles Hodge. Anyabwile has greatly served the wider evangelical community by highlighting these little known or appreciated facts.

The sermons recorded in this volume are helpful if not always expository. More importantly they provide insight into the concerns of these African American men of God. Payne's moralistic Methodism certainly comes through in his sermon "The Christian Ministry: Its Moral and Intellectual Character" (1859) from 1 Timothy 2:2. But what grabbed my attention was how all three men denounced the "style" of preaching much celebrated by many black Christians. Lemuel Haynes maintained that the manner of delivery ought to match the seriousness of the message. He writes,

The awful scenes of approaching judgment will have an influence on the Christian preacher with respect to the manner in which he will deliver the message. He will guard against the low and vulgar style that tends to degrade religion, but his language will in some manner correspond with those very solemn and affecting things that do engage his heart and tongue. He will not substitute a whining tone in place of a sermon that, to speak not worse of it, is a sort of satire upon the gospel, tending greatly to depreciate its solemnity and importance and bring it into contempt.

Payne writes,

rudeness of behavior disgraces the minister's character, for it lowers the dignity of the Christian ministry. So also does buffoonery, in which some men seem to pride themselves. I have seen some such men whom people fond of would just as soon pay twenty-five cents to hear as to see a clown in a circus.

One has to wonder what these men would have to say about the manner of preaching that characterizes many black churches today, with their particular emphasis on the "whoop." The "whoop," called by some "the celebration of black preaching," is considered essential to authentic black preaching. If it's absent, some say preaching has not taken place. As much as this sort of thing has been relished and preserved as sort of a cultural icon, these preachers from "our" past indicate a discomfort with such antics. In a sermon from 1892, Grimké says "If we turn now and examine carefully the character of the ministration of the Afro-American pulpit, its three leading characteristics will be found to be emotionalism, levity or frivolity and a greed for money." These are tough statements, but it's these kind of politically incorrect observations about the black church of their day that make these preachers so intriguing.

In his book *Walking With The Wind: A Memoir of the Movement*, the congressman and civil rights leader John Lewis writes about his student days at the American Baptist Theological Seminary: "my goal in life was to become the best preacher I could, which meant working night and day on my 'whooping.'" Referring to the famous black revival preachers during his school days, Lewis says "when shows like that came through Nashville, and they often did, we were there." Gratefully, *The Faithful Preacher* shows us another side of black preaching—one that is based not on emotionalism or showmanship, but rather on a serious study of God's Word and intentional fidelity to systematic theology.

I am grateful to Thabiti Anyabwile for introducing us to these fellow laborers of the gospel spanning many years, wars, and societal shifts in our nation at large and the black church in particular. *The Faithful Preacher* is indeed an important, insightful, and invigorating work that should benefit all who read it—whether Black or White, clergy or laity.

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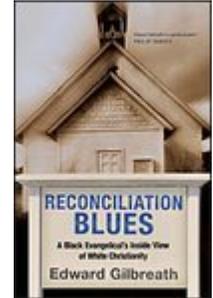
Book Review: *Reconciliation Blues: A Black Evangelical's Inside View of White Christianity*, by Edward Gilbreath

Reviewed by Eric C. Redmond

InterVarsity, 2006, 207 pages, \$20.00

Upon completing seminary, I was hired by a small evangelical Bible college. While teaching during the 2000 election cycle, I suggested that I might not cast my vote simply based on the issue of abortion alone. "You mean you would vote for Gore?" asked one student, who then remained after class to lecture me for 45 minutes on how I could not possibly be an evangelical if I voted for anyone other than George Bush. As outwardly patient as possible, I attempted to share with this student how I might see the need to consider issues in addition to abortion, especially as one who served among ethnic believers who still see issues of race as moral issues with great political ramifications.

I have yet to tell anyone how I voted that year. Nevertheless, I have shared this story many times in order to enter a dialogue on race with fellow evangelicals. Now, Edward Gilbreath has provided a means of entering and furthering the discussion by sharing similar experiences to a broader evangelical audience.



In *Reconciliation Blues*, Gilbreath, an editor-at-large for *Christianity Today* and editor of *Today's Christian*, offers the closest thing to a history of African American evangelicalism in print, albeit a biographical history that reads like a "Who's Who" of African American evangelicalism. *Reconciliation Blues* traces the storyline of many individuals who paved the way for a younger generation of African American Christians to have a voice among evangelicals. Yet Gilbreath's purposes are not simply historical. His hope is "that this inside perspective on what I regrettably call 'white Christianity' can help both Blacks and Whites get a better sense of the condition of our racial reconciliation and the distance we need to travel to make it something more authentic and true" (19).

REAL LIFE

It's refreshing to read something in this genre that doesn't simply give "Ten Simple Pointers Toward Reconciliation." The voices, opinions, and personal stories give the book a personal flavor that might not have been achieved by a series of propositional truths and application points. As an African-American, I could identify with Gilbreath's personal stories as he recounts enduring busing-desegregation, having to "play the race cop" at his workplace (29), or receiving an overfriendly invitation to dinner (an attempt to receive the "racially sensitive" badge?).

In twelve easy-to-read chapters, Gilbreath portrays what life is like for evangelical ethnic minorities who are attempting to live within white evangelical culture while maintaining their cultural identity. Along the way he considers the problematic term "evangelical," what life is like in evangelical educational institutions, as well as what it feels like to be a "Jackie Robinson"—the first African American to break the color barrier in Major League Baseball—in an evangelical ministry.

BALANCED BUT HARD-HITTING

Some readers will not agree with Gilbreath's optimistic tone in the beginning of his work: "Things are by no means all sweet and rosy on the race-relations front. Our nation continues to stumble. But, overall, most people would concede that there's been significant progress" (10). Yet Gilbreath is a realist and later concludes that, even though new generations of black evangelicals have been motivated to address the issues of race and social justice by the life and work of [Tom Skinner](#) in the sixties and seventies, the bad news is that "we still need to talk about" the church's mishandling of race and social justice "forty years later" (72).

Gilbreath's conciliatory tone is balanced by many bold criticisms of the slackness of white evangelicals on race. For instance, he writes,

To break out of the white cultural status quo of today's evangelical movement, we must confront hard truths about ourselves and about the things that truly drive our institutions. If we don't, we'll never find ourselves in that place of total freedom and faith and unity that allows us to be used by God in radical ways. As evangelical leaders, are we

trusting in God to use us to build his kingdom—in all its glorious diversity—or are we too busy trying, in his name, to preserve our own?

If we expect to see God move us toward a place of true and lasting unity, we cannot do business as usual. Nor can we wait for an older generation to pass away (82-83)

Gilbreath is even willing to criticize his employer *Christianity Today* throughout the book. Such risk-taking proves that the author is not just a casual observer but an active participant in the struggle. He is willing to take the hard strides and to demonstrate the forthright and vulnerable discussion necessary for true reconciliation.

The tone of the book is not angry, but Gilbreath admits that sometimes he lets "the angry young black man" slip out when dealing with race issues (129). Still, he is clear that the book is not an indictment of white Christians (19). Gilbreath recognizes that he and all of his readers—whether racist, greedy, prideful, or just indifferent—need grace as sinners.

ON JESSE JACKSON

For this reviewer, the heart of the book seems to be the chapters covering Gilbreath's non-evangelical heroes, Martin Luther King Jr. and Jesse Jackson. As it concerns King, space will not permit me to provide a proper analysis.

Concerning Jesse Jackson, I was amazed that Gilbreath dared to ask "is Jesse Jackson an evangelical?" In doing so, he seems to be suggesting (i) that "evangelicalism" is broad in practice; (ii) that African American evangelicals may have to stretch their "evangelical" boundaries in order to find heroes of their own hue; (iii) that those outside of the African-American family should stop calling someone else's baby "ugly." In order to achieve his goal, Gilbreath must justify evangelical leader James Meeks' relationship to Jesse Jackson while assuring readers that Meeks is truly evangelical in belief. That such a defense is necessary was demonstrated by the response Gilbreath himself received when he told his white friends and evangelical colleagues he was working on an article on Jackson:

I could see the contempt spread across their faces. There was an almost visceral distaste for the man, and this was from progressive evangelical types who had made racial reconciliation and social justice priorities in their churches and personal missions.

But Gilbreath relieves the sting of this criticism just slightly by noting that "dislike of Jackson is not just a white thing" (117).

Exalting Jesse Jackson is not the point of the chapter that bears his name in its title. When all is said and done, the reader is still left with errors in Jackson's theology and his episode of sexual immorality. Instead, the chapter on Jackson provides the reader with a significant look at the author's struggle to bring Jackson to print in a positive light on the pages of an evangelical publisher like *Christianity Today*. Editorial revisions of the original article on Jackson that Gilbreath submitted to *Christianity Today*—revisions that seemed unnecessary to Gilbreath—brought his own anger to the surface as he tried to work peaceably yet honestly as an African-American in this evangelical institution:

The problem is, my gripes usually go unspoken—especially in an evangelical world where minority voices often get drowned out by assimilation. *My white bosses just don't get it*, I say to myself. *But if I say something again, I'll be labeled as an overreacting whiner. Or, worse, an angry black man* (129).

THE BOOK'S LIMITATIONS

While this work is most enjoyable and all evangelicals should read it, it does have its limitations. For example, Gilbreath is not explicit about how the gospel demands and fosters racial reconciliation. That said, the book's stories should lead a reader to make wise conclusions about his or her next step toward the cross of reconciliation.

Also, the book does not provide a robust discussion of black preaching, the black church, and the racial divide. It doesn't discuss the role that white evangelicals' perception of black preaching plays in keeping evangelicals separated. And it doesn't examine why white evangelicals seldom join predominantly African-American churches with African-American leadership. Reconciliation is ultimately a gospel issue pertaining to the heart, including heart issues that contribute to the racial divides that play themselves out in economic terms. The "white flight" of evangelical churches that follows that white flight from neighborhoods as African Americans move into those neighborhoods is one example. Gilbreath's book would have been strengthened by a discussion of this issue or a similar issue that exemplifies the role economics plays in the racial divide among evangelicals. Admittedly, he does raise the topic in an interview with Crawford Loritts, but he never challenges the reader with it (79).

CONCLUSION

Gilbreath suggests that he wants his faith "to be one that is nurtured, strengthened and stretched by the Psalms, the Gospels and the Epistles, as well as Bono, MLK and *The Matrix*" (40). While this reviewer is not so sure about Bono and *The Matrix* strengthening his faith, I agree with Gilbreath's general sentiment. Evangelicals need to be stretched if there is going to be true racial reconciliation, and that stretching will occur as when we see our primary identities as people of the red blood poured out at the cross. This and this alone is the real cure for the *Blues*. If the reader keeps this in mind while reading Gilbreath, there may be hope for true reconciliation among all races.

Eric C. Redmond is the Pastor of Hillcrest Baptist Church in Temple Hills, Maryland, and the 2007-2008 Second Vice-President of the Southern Baptist Convention. He blogs at [A Man from Issachar](#) and [The Council of Reforming Churches](#).

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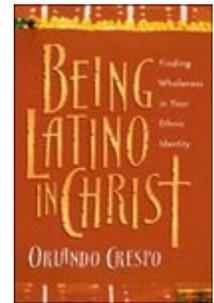


Book Review: *Being Latino in Christ: Finding Wholeness in Your Ethnic Identity*, by Orlando Crespo

Reviewed by Juan R. Sanchez Jr.

InterVarsity Press, 2003, 156 pages, \$13

When my daughters come of age and are asked to complete the questionnaire for the United States Census Bureau, I wonder how they will respond to the questions about ethnicity and race. In the 2000 Census Individual Report long form, question five asks, "Are you Spanish/Hispanic/Latino?" Question six then asks a person to classify him or herself as "White/Black, African Am., or Negro/American Indian or Alaska Native . . . Other Asian/Some other race." I wonder because I am a first generation "Spanish/Hispanic/Latino" born in Puerto Rico, and I married a woman with deep roots in white America. I assume that my daughters would respond "Yes (Puerto Rican)" to question five and "White" to question six. After all, those are the only options.



Orlando Crespo has written *Being Latino in Christ: Finding Wholeness in Your Ethnic Identity* for second-generation Latinos like my daughters—Latinos who find themselves in the twilight zone of belonging to two ethnic cultures but not feeling "ethnic enough" to fit into either. Crespo believes that by embracing both parent cultures Latino Americans (and I assume he would include other bicultural Americans) can provide a bridge between cultures and serve both parent cultures in the name of Christ. He states,

In this book I argue that most Latinos born in the United States will be happiest somewhere in between [the two parent cultures]. I seek to point us toward a healthy balance as we gain a conceptual understanding of Latino ethnic identity and learn how to practically live out our God-given strengths and gifts (10).

SUMMARY

Being Latino recounts Crespo's personal and traumatic journey toward embracing his Latino roots and coming to terms with his calling to minister in multicultural America. He then hopes to encourage other second-generation Latinos to do the same. Crespo recalls the racist attitudes against his ethnicity that led him to be ashamed of being Latino. These forced him to adopt survivalist strategies by which he could live in two ethnic worlds. Then he took a trip to Puerto Rico and discovered his ethnic roots. His journey of ethnic self-discovery was directed in part by four trail markers: "(1) connecting with others like me; (2) embracing the pain of my people; (3) understanding Latino complexity and alienation; (4) receiving encouragement for the journey" (17).

After sharing his own story, Crespo attempts to broaden the term "Latino" by proposing two constitutive factors for ethnic self-identity: (1) Latino heritage somewhere in the family which can be traced back to a Hispanic country and (2) a willingness to identify with that heritage "by being open about our ethnic roots, taking initiative to learn more about our Latino culture and caring about the issues relevant to our people" (30). Crespo then provides an ethnic identity/assimilation grid "that can help you see where you stand in your ethnic sense of self" (41). The grid indicates whether there has been a high assimilation to American mainstream culture or a high Latino ethnic identity.

In order to help Latinos understand their biculturalism, Crespo uses the paradigm of *mestizaje*. *Mestizos* were the offspring of the Spaniards and the Native peoples during the Spanish conquest of the Western Hemisphere. According to Justo Gonzalez, *mestizo* "was a pejorative term, by which the Spaniard or the 'pure' criollos who were their descendants justified their control of power and wealth, and the oppression of the Indian as well as of the mestizo" (56). Crespo believes that when one understands the negative effects of *mestizaje*, such as self-hatred and a low sense of self-worth, one may overcome issues of inferiority through faith in Christ. Of course the whole purpose for this journey of ethnic self-discovery is to use our God-given bicultural ethnicity for ministry and racial reconciliation.

STRENGTHS

I was encouraged and convicted by reading *Being Latino in Christ*. It encouraged me about my own identity as a Puerto Rican, as well as by the fact that God has graciously and sovereignly saved me and called me to minister in a multi-cultural city to a

multi-cultural congregation. I concur with Orlando Crespo that my biculturalism has permitted me to enter into a variety of ministry opportunities that I may not have had if I only identified with one culture.

By this token, *Being Latino* convicted me because I remember a time in junior high school when I would have gladly anglicized my name in order to fit in with our small town society. This was not in response to overt racism; it was more about Junior High peer pressure. Had it not been for the encouragement of my music teacher, I may now be known as "John Raymond" Sanchez! Also, the book made me realize that I have not spent enough time teaching my daughters about our Puerto Rican heritage or the Spanish language.

Crespo strikes a good balance between grounding our identities firstly in Christ while also affirming the significance of our ethnic identities. So on the one hand, Crespo states that "culture and ethnicity are not to be set over who we are in Christ" (80). In Christ God has removed ethnic barriers (Jew/Gentile), social barriers (slave/free), and gender barriers (male/female)—"for you are all one in Christ" (Gal. 3:28). At the same time, God has not eradicated ethnicity (or gender). Crespo correctly understands this, stating that "throughout the Scriptures we find God affirming culture with the intent of bringing all cultures and peoples under His lordship, as opposed to merging them all into a homogeneous culture" (67). Therefore, it's unhelpful to suggest that God is "colorblind." From Genesis to Revelation God has revealed a redemptive plan to gather for himself a people "from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages" (Gen. 12:1-3; Rev. 7:9).

WEAKNESSES

In light of God's work of gathering a multi-ethnic people, however, I wish the author would have further developed the biblical framework for the place of ethnicity within God's plan for the nations both now and in the new earth. Chapter 5 is titled "Ethnicity in the Scriptures" and promises to provide a biblical framework for ethnicity (65), but Crespo's framework includes only a few biblical characters whose ethnic identity was "a tool in the hands of God to fulfill his purposes in the world" (65). In the end, I found the biblical framework offered so simplistic that I purchased and read J. Daniel Hays' *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race*, a book that I found illuminating, thorough, and helpful in this regard. It answered the biblical-theological questions that were left undeveloped by Crespo.

Given Crespo's admission that our identity in Christ is more important than our ethnic identity, it's strange that his proposal lacked gospel-centeredness. To be sure, Crespo grounds his proposal in Scripture and in Christ, but somehow the gospel of God's work of reconciling sinners to Christ and his body felt peripheral. It is the gospel preached to Abraham that reveals God's plan for a multi-ethnic people (Gal. 3:7). It is the gospel that addresses sin, including racism. It is the gospel that provides the paradigm for true forgiveness and reconciliation through the cross of Christ for all peoples. And it is through this gospel that God is now gathering a multi-ethnic assembly for his own glory. Therefore, this gospel has implications for how we are to live our lives in Christ here and now.

As such, Crespo never addresses a number of questions that I wish he had: How should God's redemptive plan for a multi-ethnic people be expressed in our local churches? Should there be "Latino" churches or should we strive to have multi-ethnic congregations? And so on.

Perhaps these questions weren't addressed because the book was guided by the author's personal experience and was intended to encourage readers to embrace their ethnic identity. This is both a strength and a weakness. Since issues of race and ethnicity are personal, it is understandable that the author would present the issues from his personal experiences of living through racism. Yet the author's experience was not my experience. Crespo says he had to overcome self-hatred, feelings of shame about his ethnic identity, and a low sense of self-worth. I grew up in a small town in central Florida and did not experience prejudice to the degree that I felt ashamed of being Latino. Perhaps my case was unique.

Still, I struggle with the idea that in embracing our Hispanic roots we Latinos must somehow "embrace the oppression" of our ancestors and "feel their pain." Here the *mestizaje* paradigm proves unhelpful, for it presumes an oppressed history that must be embraced if we are to gain a true ethnic identity. I agree that we should learn about our ethnic cultures, learn from our histories, and identify with our heritage. But I fear that offering a paradigm which assumes and identifies with oppression may induce us to carry a chip on our shoulders, thus actually hindering racial reconciliation. It may even fan the flame of racial division.

CONCLUSION

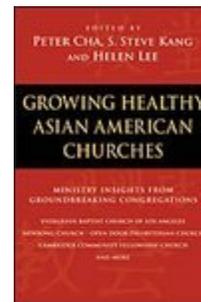
Overall, *Being Latino in Christ* is a helpful tool for second-generation Latinos who struggle with their ethnic identity on a personal level. If you are a second-generation Latino, this book will help you assess your ethnic awareness and identity and then use this identity for the work of the ministry. However, read this book along with Daniel Hays' *From Every People and Nation* so that you can gain a biblical-theological view of race and ethnicity that will move from an individual understanding of ethnicity to God's overall plan for a multi-ethnic people. Once you have a clear ethnic self-identity as a Latino in America, then

use your God-given ethnicity with all its inherent benefits and blessings to advance the gospel and serve in ministry and racial reconciliation as God allows.

Juan R. Sanchez Jr. is the pastor of High Pointe Baptist Church in Austin, Texas.

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Comparative Book Reviews: *Growing Healthy Asian American Churches*, By Peter Cha, S. Steve Kang, and Helen Lee



Book reviews by Jeremy Yong and Geoffrey Chang

IVP, 2006, 221 pages, \$16

- **Review # 1: By Jeremy Yong**
- **Review # 2: By Geoffrey Chang**



Review # 1: by Jeremy Yong

Yes! When I found out about *Growing Healthy Asian American Churches*, I had to get it. I was raised in and converted through the influence of a Chinese Baptist church in Southern California. Yet ever since my own calling into the ministry, I have had very few opportunities to formally think through the many questions that surface in the type of multi-cultural church that characterized these earlier years.

- How can we promote unity in body when we speak different languages?
- Can the Mandarin congregation, the Cantonese congregation, and the English congregation function as one church?
- How can bonds be strengthened between the elders of all three congregations?
- Why has the second generation left the church and how should we think about that biblically?

These are the kinds of questions that Chinese and other ethnic churches face, which is why any contribution to the conversation is welcome.

The editors of this volume had a difficult task: to encourage Asian American churches across a number of denominations towards greater health. At the same time, most of the contributors are open to questioning whether an "Asian American church" is even a valid category. Whether it is or not, they push Asian American churches to consider how to adapt to the growing multi-ethnicity of our churches today.

OVERVIEW

Building on the biblical image of the household of God (Eph 2:19; 1 Tim 3:15; 1 Pet 2:5), *Asian American Churches* tell stories of various congregations and their efforts to become healthy. The key to health, say editors Cha and Lee, is helping "our congregations' beliefs and actions mirror one another" (13). Most congregations lack agreement between their two operating theologies—their explicit theology (proclaimed faith) and their implicit theology (practiced faith). In fact, "recent studies"—which are never cited—show that a congregation's implicit theology exerts greater influence in shaping its members than its explicit theology. But "when our churches are orthodox and engage in orthopraxis our churches will continue to grow as healthy households of God" (13).

In order to help a church's two operating theologies mirror one another, the contributors offer eight implicit "biblically informed values" that they believe will bring health. And the book's nine chapters each address these eight biblically informed values. The first chapter emphasizes grace. The second chapter emphasizes truth. The third and fourth emphasize leadership. The fifth trust. The sixth hospitality and evangelism. The seventh multigenerations. The eighth gender relations. And the ninth justice and mercy.

Along the way, the ten contributors to this book (from different denominations) seek to answer the following questions: What does a healthy Asian American household of God look like? What traits and qualities should characterize such a congregation? How does a congregation become a healthy household of God?

STRENGTHS

As a whole, *Asian American Churches* has a number of strengths. First, the contributors demonstrate a genuine desire to see Asian American churches strengthened. It's evident they have spent much time and energy laboring in their congregations and communities so that people would come to know Jesus Christ.

Second, the book touches on the main issues Asian American churches face such as the influence of shame-based cultures, Confucianism, and intergenerational fellowship. And, third, they do so in a very practical way leaving the reader with examples to follow. Peter Cha asks the following practical questions:

- "Does your church sponsor intergenerational activities?"
- "Does your church have distinct separate cultures that promote further segregation among different people groups in your church?"
- "Do you approach and work out generational conflicts with an attitude of humility and servanthood of our Lord Jesus?"

Another great challenge comes from Steve Kang: "Healthy Asian American churches must continually ask themselves whether they have intentionally allowed the Word of God, through the work of the Holy Spirit, to shape the identity, life and trajectory of the truth-embodiment community" (48).

Without doubt, this book will challenge many Asian Americans in ministry and help them think more critically about how they "do church." It will, I hope, generate additional constructive conversation that will lead to the vibrant health of all Asian American churches. I am happy to recommend it because of its insights into the dynamics of immigrant churches, especially Asian American churches.

WEAKNESSES

However, my recommendation comes with a few caveats. While I certainly agree our beliefs and our actions need to mirror one another, as do our explicit and implicit theology, I fear that by beginning with implicit theology they approach the problem backwards. It may be that "most congregations fail to experience such an agreement between their operating theologies," but isn't that because they don't realize that action is supposed to flow from doctrine? More specifically, could it be that these churches don't know what they believe about the gospel of Jesus Christ? He is, after all, the cornerstone.

Since doctrine must birth action, people must first know who God is and what he desires of them before adequately addressing the how-tos of church. Second Peter 1 makes this clear. God has given his children "everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him" (v. 3). Therefore, we are to "make every effort" to pursue holiness (v. 5). We see the same thing in Titus 3. Paul tells Titus and the churches in Crete to "devote themselves to doing what is good" (v. 8), and to do so *because* of several propositional truths: God our Savior has appeared (v. 4); he has granted salvation through the rebirth and renewal by the Spirit poured out through Jesus Christ our Savior (vv. 5-6); and now we have "the hope of eternal life" (v. 7). The church's doctrine gives birth to the church's action.

Another caveat: The book uses several misleading examples. In the first chapter, the contributor describes a minister who commits adultery and is divorced by his wife. The author then describes how this pastor was "hurt and angry" because of the church's misuse of discipline with him. Yet the author mentions nothing about how church discipline can be an act of love within a body, potentially leaving some readers believing that all church-discipline is hurtful.

Another misleading example comes from Soong-Chan Ra's chapter on mercy and justice. He calls the church to confront "systemic injustice." Then he names several examples like "the enslavement of Africans, the genocide of the Native Americans and the internment of Japanese Americans during World War 2" (197). Then, three lines down on the page, he speaks of the "racist attitudes" of LifeWay Christian Resources (of the Southern Baptist Convention) and their 2004 Vacation Bible School curriculum "Rickshaw Rally: Far Out, Far East."

Huh? How can he mention the enslavement of Africans and LifeWay Christian Resources in the very same breath? Call LifeWay what you want, but is not comparing chattel slavery with the blunders of LifeWay an injustice itself?

CONCLUSION

With these caveats, I am happy to recommend the book. Perhaps more could be said than what was said in this book. Nonetheless it makes a helpful contribution to the larger conversation. If you have been thinking about issues facing the Asian American church (or any multi cultural/generational/lingual church), pick it up. You will find good examples of how some brothers and sisters are working to present their congregations mature in Christ.

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Review # 2: by Geoffrey Chang

The dilemma for ethnic churches is a familiar one.

Immigrants move to a foreign country in search of opportunities. They are drawn to other immigrants who share the same language and culture, and plant churches together so that they can worship in their native tongue, and raise their families in these churches. The difficulty begins with the next generation. Their children begin losing the traditional culture, replacing it with the local culture. The ethnic church continues to provide a familiar community for new immigrants, but it becomes decreasingly relevant for each passing generation.

How will the church deal with these two increasingly different groups under one roof? How can the church ensure that it is built on biblical truth, rather than a particular culture? How does an ethnic church fit into the bigger picture of what God is doing? These and many other difficulties face Asian American churches today.

SUMMARY

Growing Healthy Asian American Churches, edited by Peter Cha, S. Steve Kang, and Helen Lee, attempts to address these challenges by discussing "the theme of developing healthy Asian American congregations, exploring both 'what we are becoming' and 'what we are called to do', our identity as well as our mission" (13). This book advocates eight values that should characterize healthy Asian American congregations—or "households" (13)—and enable them to overcome the challenges facing ethnic churches:

1. *Grace-filled households* – Asian American churches should be built on the grace that we have received from our relationship with Christ, rather than "a methodology to be imposed on a church" (31). "Grace-based ministry is our service to God based on our experience of his generosity to us" (25).
2. *Truth-embodying households* – Asian American churches should be "the earthly embodiment of the risen Christ, the truth-embodying community in time and space" (45). This truth is not merely "a set of esoteric propositions" (47), but rather is found in a relationship with Christ.
3. *Healthy leaders, healthy households* – Healthy households will not exist apart from healthy leaders. Rather than looking to their culture, they must look to the Bible, which "provides numerous examples of timeless leadership principles that apply regardless of cultural setting" (67).
4. *Trusting households: Openness to change* – As difficult as change may be, healthy households will embrace change by "[trusting] in God and what God is doing in their churches" (109).
5. *Hospitable households: Evangelism* – In this postmodern age, healthy households must "think of evangelism not as a program but as a way of life that proclaims the good news to those who have open hearts, souls and minds" (124).
6. *Multigenerational households* – Given the intergenerational conflict that is so prevalent in ethnic churches, "developing intergenerational ties is a critical task for Asian congregations in North America" (148).
7. *Gender relations in healthy households* – Harmful views of gender exist in Asian culture. Yet a healthy church will provide "a sociocultural and spiritual environment in which its members can form healthy... gender identities... [and] safely explore and develop all of the gifts that the Holy Spirit has sovereignly given to them" (165).
8. *Households of mercy and justice* – Healthy churches understand that evangelism is not simply "individual salvation but... the expression of God's kingdom values into the world" (191), particularly through mercy ministries and social justice.

STRENGTHS

The challenges facing Asian American churches have to do with both traditional Asian culture, as well as contemporary American culture, and these eight values attempt to get at the root of these challenges by applying eternal biblical truths. As can be seen from the eight values, there is much that can be commended in this book. Two points stand out in particular:

Cultural Insights

First, *Asian American Churches* provides helpful insights into the East Asian culture and how its influences affect the church. In discussing leadership in the Asian church, for instance, the book highlights the Asian tendencies towards authoritarian hierarchy, false humility, saving face, and conflict avoidance as hindrances to healthy leadership and as "contradictory to Christian teaching" (61).

Similarly, the constant drive in Asian culture for achievement and even perfection in education and work often contradicts the grace of God. This ambition must "be supplanted by the freedom of knowing that God loves us unconditionally" (33, 68).

One of the most helpful insights is the function of the Asian church as a cultural center. For example, in less than a century, over 4,000 Korean churches have been planted, and yet "the growth in the number of these churches has little to do with any targeted evangelistic effort" (124). Rather, it's because the church has become a place for both "spiritual support and relational support...the overriding institution that helped Koreans maintain their own cultural identity" (124). Clearly, Asian American churches are heavily influenced by Asian values, and they must wrestle with the effect of these influences on their faith.

More than Pragmatism

Second, *Asian American Churches* provides a vision for healthy churches that goes beyond pragmatism and numerical church growth. Unlike many contemporary books on the church, it emphasizes the spiritual and relational aspects of a healthy church, while exploring the outward responsibility of the church to the community and the world. *Asian American Churches* criticizes leaders who would "unreflectively borrow from either successful megachurches or notable mainstream Christian thinkers who advocate some sort of one-size-fits-all teaching." Instead, Asian American pastors are to "struggle to understand the particular place and role the Asian American church is called to fulfill in God's kingdom" (49).

When it comes to evangelism, Christians must be careful to depend on the Holy Spirit through prayer (131). Moreover, "the road to effective evangelism is not merely measured by yearly conversions." Rather, churches must "focus more on the process and journey of coming to Christ than on a singular moment of decision to accept Christ" (144).

Asian American Churches's emphasis on the need for social engagement is particularly commendable. If churches are to be faithful, "they must have a public witness and not merely exist for the sake of maintaining their own households" (185). One way this is fulfilled is in its active participation in "ministries of justice and mercy" (186). *Asian American Churches* does not see church health simply as new programs or bigger buildings, but recognizes the importance of spiritual growth and social engagement.

WEAKNESSES

Although there are many helpful insights in this book, it ultimately falls short as a biblical guide for Asian American churches due to several key weaknesses.

Lack of Clarity on the Gospel, Conversion, and Evangelism

First, there is a lack of clarity about the message of the gospel. The book defines grace as "the outrageous generosity of God" (21), but strangely, it never gives a clear description of what this generosity looks like or how it is conveyed to us (i.e. through the gospel). The closest thing to an explanation of the gospel in the book is this: "[God's generosity] is given at the expense of his justice. There was a cost to God's generosity, and it was paid by Jesus' death on the cross" (22). Aside from the fact that God's grace is *not* given at the expense of his justice, but through the satisfaction of it, there is no clear articulation of God's perfect holiness, our utter sinfulness, God's wrath against sin, Christ's substitutionary sacrifice, or the free offer of salvation by faith in Christ alone. Granted, this book is not meant to be a systematic theology on the atonement. But if grace is to be the foundation of all the church's activities, it cannot be depicted vaguely or abstractly, but must be shown forth in all its historical reality and theological glory in the gospel. Clearly and continuously proclaiming the gospel is particularly critical in Asian American churches, which, as *Asian American Churches* rightly points out, are often more "Asian" than "Christian" (124).

This lack of clarity about the gospel will result in other errors in the ministry of the church. One example of this is a misunderstanding of conversion. Without a clear gospel message, conversion is seen not so much as a spiritual transformation resulting in repentance and faith in Christ, but rather it is a gradual movement toward Christian values from Christian relationships. "As one enters this household the value system of that household begins to influence the individual" (191). One contributor writes, "healthy Asian American churches are... not as focused on immediate conversions but on bringing each of their members and attendees to a closer relationship with Christ and with one another" (131). Yet Scripture clearly teaches that apart from a spiritual (or "immediate") conversion, there is no relationship with Christ or with his body.

This misunderstanding of conversion has a huge impact on the church's evangelism. Evangelism no longer focuses on the proclamation of the gospel, but is primarily about building relationships with people. Therefore, being sensitive to different worldviews, being transparent and vulnerable, raking yards, meeting felt needs, and rearranging worship services are all different ways the church evangelizes. Now, these are not bad things and often can be useful in evangelism. But without a clear proclamation of the gospel, there can be no salvation. If churches tragically misunderstand the task of evangelism and fail to communicate the message of the gospel, they might develop friendships, but their pews will be filled with lost and unconverted people.

Disconnect from the Rest of Christianity

A second weakness is disconnectedness from the rest of Christianity. Sadly, Asian culture has had a history of isolationism, and this is often repeated in how Asian American churches are disconnected from other churches, and from the historical roots of the church. An obvious example of this is *Asian American Churches's* focus only on contemporary Asian American churches as examples for healthy churches. This is understandable given the audience of this book. But for churches that wish to fight harmful cultural influences, the book would have benefited by studying churches in different cultures in order to learn from their strengths.

Along these same lines, the book also fails to call Asian American churches to a deeper grasp of its historical roots. Since Asian American churches are a relatively young church in America, the only history in which they have participated is the "American fundamentalist Christian culture that nurtured many of the Asian American churches in the first half of the twentieth century... [and] the American church-growth movement of the 1970s to the present" (33). These two movements in particular have had significant influence in Asian American churches. In church history, however, we see a much wider picture. There is so much in church history that would serve the Asian American context well: the persecution and boldness of the Reformers, the history of missions to East Asia, the perseverance of early Christians in house churches, the challenge of nominal Christianity under the state church, the pursuit of truth through careful study and discussion in historical councils, the migration of the Puritans to the New World, and countless other accounts of God's faithfulness. By connecting Asian American churches to the stream of God's work throughout church history, they would gain greater balance, humility, and wisdom in responding to the trends and movements of our day and fulfilling their unique role in redemptive history.

Weak Ecclesiology

Finally, *Asian American Churches* fails to provide an adequate ecclesiology for Asian American churches. There is never a clear definition in this book of what the local church is. In one place, a contributor writes, "the church can be described as the *space* and *time* where God's chosen people affirm their new life in Jesus Christ through worship, instruction, fellowship and expression" (44). Here it would seem that the local church is the setting where God's people gather. Elsewhere, the book states, "Church is a hospital room where a distressed mother and child have no one to turn to but their church family. Church is a home where discord and stress have brought a family to its breaking point" (184). Here, the definition of the church is based on the ministry of the church to care for the needy.

Without a clear definition of the local church, the readers are either left to wonder exactly what the church is, or to fill in their own understanding of the church. Yet we see in Scripture that the church (*ecclesia*) is ultimately not a setting or certain ministries, but a congregation, an assembly of people who have been called by God, saved in Christ, and transformed by the Holy Spirit.

Without a biblical definition of the local church, all other aspects of ecclesiology in this book suffer. We see this deficiency in the area of church membership, where churches are encouraged to incorporate unbelievers into their "household" as part of their evangelism. We see it in the area of church discipline, where a pastor allows a couple to join the church, even while they are living together unmarried (36) or where leaders have no idea how to lovingly discipline an elder or pastor caught in immorality. We see it in the area of church leadership, where there is no clear understanding of the roles of elders or deacons or the congregation. These are all areas in which Asian American churches are very weak, and yet are extremely important to the health of the church.

As right as *Asian American Churches* is in pointing out the dangers for the church of the Asian tendency to authoritarian hierarchy, avoiding conflict resolution, saving face, etc., it fails to provide a biblical and practical ecclesiology that can counteract these influences and act as a guide for the church.

CONCLUSION

Asian American Churches is one of the first books of its kind, written specifically about the Asian American church and its challenges. It provides many helpful insights into the Asian culture and how it affects the identity and ministry of the Asian American church. However, because of its failure to articulate the gospel clearly, connect Asian American churches to other churches, and integrate a biblical ecclesiology, *Asian American Churches* fails to be a sufficient guide for Asian American

churches. Nonetheless, my hope is that this book is the beginning of a fruitful conversation among Asian American leaders on what the Bible has to say about growing healthy Asian American churches.

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Five Steps for Racial Reconciliation on Sunday at 11 a.m.*

By *D. A. Carson*

- **Step 1: Know the History of the Problem**
- **Step 2: Recognize Our Mutual Culpability**
- **Step 3: Consider Your Church's Neighborhood**
- **Step 4: Consider the Real Gospel Tensions**
- **Step 5: Think Biblically & Theologically**

I am not going to address the entire sweep of what might fall under the rubric "racism," but focus on one small subset of the problem that has a peculiar bearing on Christians. It has been argued that in America the most segregated hour of the week is 11:00 a.m. on Sunday morning. I am not sure if that is true, but it may well be. This claim results in repeated calls for reconciliation, repentance, hard love, forgiveness, forbearance, sacrificial love, renouncing the past, and much more. Some of these calls are spot on; some of them, one fears, descend to the level of demagoguery and manipulation. In this section I cannot possibly address complex patterns of racism among Christians as those patterns are manifest in different parts of the world. Instead, I want to focus especially on the North American context and think out loud about some of the ways racism displays itself in the church. In particular, this means thinking about the ways in which the demands for love and forgiveness need to be applied. In short, it means thinking about the urgent need for love in hard places.

Step 1: Know the History of the Problem

I begin in this article with some brief historical reflections. I am indebted to some recent books on race and slavery that have taught me a good deal. Among the best researched of these are some works by Thomas Sowell.[1] He points out that until the nineteenth century, slavery in one form or another had been part of every major civilization. Various Chinese dynasties had slaves; Indians had slaves; the dominant African tribes had slaves (substantial numbers of slaves sold to the Western world and to the Persian Gulf were sold by other Africans); the Israelites had slaves; the Egyptians, Hittites, Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans all had slaves. The major "barbarian" tribes of Europe had slaves. The Arab world had slaves. So there is a sense in which, from the vantage of history until about two centuries ago, the phenomenon of slavery was not itself viewed as shocking.

When Sowell hunts down the deciding element in the moves toward the abolition of slavery, he fastens primary attention on the impact of the Evangelical Awakening. Not only John Wesley himself, but also many of the leading converts of that God-given movement, including the Countess of Huntingdon, William Wilberforce, and the Earl of Shaftesbury, invested enormous energy in navigating the abolition of slavery through the British Parliament. Once it was passed, British gunboats (doubtless with other motives as well) largely halted the trade across the Atlantic. It is estimated that about eleven million Africans were shipped to the Americas (though substantial numbers failed to reach the other side, owing to the horrific conditions slaves had to endure in the boats). At the same time, about fourteen million Africans were shipped up the Persian Gulf or across the Sahara into the Arab and Egyptian worlds under traveling conditions more horrific yet.[2] British gunboats eventually shut down most of that trade as well once the Ottoman Empire formally banned slavery and thereby gave the British navy the legal pretense to proceed.[3] Interestingly enough, there has arisen considerable guilt-literature regarding slavery in the Western world; it is difficult to find much that is similar in the Arab world.

I must hasten to add that Christians, especially in America, must not pat themselves on the back too quickly for the beneficial social results of the Evangelical Awakening so far as slavery is concerned. For the fact of the matter is that the part of the country where evangelical confessionalism was strongest, in the South, was the place where slavery was hardest to dislodge. In the end it took the Civil War (though that war was about more than slavery), America's bloodiest.

Not all forms of slavery are alike, however. Inevitably cultures that enslave others are dominant, and a fair bit of slavery, historically speaking, has issued from military might. Some has been conscripted forced labor (e.g., for the building of the Egyptian pyramids); some of it has been fed by religious persecution (e.g., the slaughter and enslavement of the Huguenots); very often there are mixed motives (e.g., the current savage bloodshed and slavery in the southern Sudan, which is fed by tribalism, religion [Muslim versus Christian], and oil interests). In some cultures, economics must not be discounted. In the Roman Empire, for example, there were no bankruptcy laws—ancient equivalents to Chapter 11 and Chapter 13 in the U.S. and similar legislation in other countries. When a family fell into arrears, selling one or more members of the family to the

creditor was often the only way out. A well-to-do relative or neighbor could redeem these slaves, but doubtless that did not happen as often as many slaves might have liked.

These realities meant that slavery in the Roman Empire was a bit different from that in the West. In the West, none of the slavery was the result of free people selling themselves into slavery because they were bankrupt. More important, in the Roman world there were slaves from many different races and cultures: slaves could be British, from the Italian peninsula, Jewish, African, and so on. But there were also free individuals from all those heritages, and some of these were learned or influential. That meant that there was little identification between slavery and one particular race.[4] By contrast, in the West from the beginning almost all blacks were slaves, and certainly only blacks were slaves.[5] That meant that even after legal emancipation, the psychological association of slavery and black skin has lingered on for a long time both in the minds of whites and in the minds of blacks.

This history has also contributed to the public perception, including the Christian perception, of where the problem lies when it comes to the desirability of integrating Christian churches. For without giving it much thought, when we think of integrated churches, we primarily think of black/white integration, and we usually assume the deepest barriers are on the white side, the majority side. But the issues are complicated. Without for a moment wanting to play down the commonness of white prejudice, we must reflect as well on the many Korean churches here, the many Chinese churches, the many Latino and Vietnamese churches, and so forth. In all of these cases, very often the Christians who are least desirous of integrating with others are from the minority side: many Koreans and Chinese and Vietnamese and Latinos want to preserve something of their own culture and race and heritage. Some of the problems come, as we shall see, in the second and third generation. And similarly, it is not too surprising that many African-Americans would prefer to worship in African-American churches, even while they may feel that the point of exclusion is entirely or almost entirely on the European-American side.

The issues become still more complicated when two other factors are borne in mind. First, many minority churches argue today that the church is the only social institution that preserves the meeting of minorities as minorities, and it is this social construction that permits a group to raise up leaders to represent it. Many of the earliest African-American civil rights leaders were clergy—an eloquent testimony to the significance of churches in preserving a social identity.

Second, there has been a shift from the agenda of the 1960s to the agenda of the 1990s and beyond. In the 1960s the call was for equality, inclusion, integration; in the 1990s and now in the new millennium, the call is for multiculturalism, respect for diversity, the importance of preserving distinct communities.[6] Inevitably, therefore, "otherness" is more difficult to assess. It might be a reflection of the desire to preserve something good, not least among minorities themselves; equally, it might be a reflection of xenophobia, resentment, exclusion. The human heart being what it is, in most cases both of these motives will surface simultaneously.

If in North America we talk about the integration of the local church, however, the shape of that discussion, given our history and demographics, will necessarily focus first of all on the black/white divide, even if it must extend far beyond that divide. It will be determined, at least in part, by the demographics of a particular neighborhood.

Step 2: Recognize Our Mutual Culpability

I think we need more public discussion of the fact that racism usually comes from both sides of any race divide. Many African-Americans do not accept this. They think that racism is the sin of the powerful, the sin of the overlord; they think of racism as the sum of racial prejudice plus power. By definition, then, they cannot be racists since they do not have the power. I do not see how thoughtful Christians, black or white, can accept such a definition.

True, slavery is the sin of the powerful, not the weak; and very often racism follows the same pattern. But if racism is defined in terms of exclusion, then racism occurs wherever anyone is dismissed or disowned or demeaned or stereotyped for no other reason than his or her race or ethnicity. Doubtless many white racists think that African-Americans are intrinsically prone to violence, not too bright, and more of the same; but many an African-American finds it hard to imagine that "Whitey" can ever be trusted or should ever be given the benefit of the doubt. It may be useful to draw an analogy. If materialism is the exclusive sin of the rich, then only rich people can be materialistic. But if materialism is the passionate love of material goods, such that God himself is deposed, then poor people may be as horribly materialistic as the rich.

Because I am white, I am sure it is difficult for some African-Americans to hear such plain home truths from me; indeed, I have had African-American students at the seminary where I teach gently and ruefully tell me that although they are sure what I am saying is the truth, it is very hard for them to accept it from me. All the more honor to them, then, for trying.

Moreover, some leaders on both sides of any racial divide love to play the race card to keep themselves in power. George Wallace used to do it all the time, flagrantly and repeatedly, until he had a change of heart; not a few of our contemporaries follow the early George Wallace, not the later George Wallace. That early Wallace stance was profoundly repulsive, deeply evil.

Because of the many legal sanctions now in place, some forget the bitter degradation of the Jim Crow culture. The attitudes wedded to the Jim Crow culture have not everywhere been expunged. I suspect that most European-Americans have very little understanding of the cumulative destructive power of the little degradations that almost all African-Americans, especially older African-Americans, have experienced—to say nothing of the less common but still too frequent threats, racial profiling, and frankly illegal (to say nothing of immoral) injustices they have suffered.

On the other hand, the Reverend Al Sharpton constantly plays the race card on the African-American side, and he is far from being the only one. The instant appeal to "racism" when young thugs are expelled from a school, regardless of color or ethnicity, succeeds only in reducing the credibility of the ranters. The best way to diminish racist demagoguery is for European-Americans to expose and dismiss European-American demagogues and for African-Americans to expose and dismiss African-American demagogues.

Because of the background of racism in America, it is easy to discern racism where it does not exist. I recall an African—i.e., a citizen of an African country, not an African-American—telling me of his painful, belittling experiences when he was trying to secure his "green card" at a major U.S. immigration point. Initially he was convinced that what he had experienced was raw racism. But I could not help encouraging him to loosen up a little, for I had had identical—indeed, as we compared notes, even worse—experiences when my wife and I applied for our "green cards" at the same center a few years earlier. The association of rudeness with racism is entirely understandable, of course, but there is plenty of rudeness to go around even where there is little racism.

Once again if we are interested in integrated local Christian churches, it is high time that we recognize that the challenge extends beyond the black/white divide and that the attitudinal problems are on both sides of most divides. Many a Korean-American church (to take but one example) is run by first-generation Korean Christians who are most comfortable with the way things are done back home. That means that "otherness" is hard for them, especially if part of the issue is language, part of the issue is preserving Korean culture (and even Korean forms of "spirituality"), part of the issue is a Confucian preservation of hierarchy and order, and part of the issue is their desire that their children marry other Koreans. Sometimes these churches keep calling senior pastors fresh from Korea, thus renewing the strong linguistic and cultural links with "home." This practice may have the effect sooner or later of repelling second- and third-generation Korean-American Christians, whose command of Korean may not be all that good anymore and, more importantly, whose cultural adaptation means they no longer live in the world of their parents. Those same parents can easily see these developments as cultural or even personal betrayal, or the fruit of degenerative and corrupt moral influence. Some of this judgment, of course, may be right! But some of it, quite frankly, is racist. To add to the complexity, some in the third generation, by now profoundly Americanized, choose to revert to their Korean roots, and in consequence tend to shun other American "friends." At what point is this an expression of racism?

Lest anyone should think that I am picking on Koreans, I hasten to add that most of our major influxes of immigrants have faced similar problems. They are at different points in the transition, depending on how long ago the major influx for that group took place. I am old enough to remember not a few German Baptist churches facing similar problems as the number of German-speakers declined in their congregations, and their children became more assimilated. In some ways, of course, their assimilation was smoother because Germans are (mostly!) white; in other ways, their assimilation faced peculiar difficulties associated with the hatreds aroused by World War II.

Step 3: Consider Your Church's Neighborhood

Part of thinking about racial division in churches should involve considering some local churches that are remarkably integrated. I am thinking of one in the San Francisco Bay area, for example, that has three full-time pastors. One pastor is Latino (he was born in Mexico), and he is married to a Japanese-American wife (second generation). Another is Anglo, married to an African-American woman; a third is also Anglo, married to a Vietnamese-American. And, frankly, their interesting diversity reflects the demographic diversity of the church they serve.

I am also thinking of another church, this one on the East Coast, in one of the boroughs of New York City. The last time I was there, I personally talked to people from more than thirty countries. Better yet, there was very little evidence of stereotyping. South of the Mason-Dixon line, most people who sit down and eat in restaurants in many neighborhoods are white; most who serve are black. But at this church I met an African-American who had just gotten out of Rikers on a drug charge and another African-American who was an influential physician. I met a white chap of Italian descent, recently converted, and with family ties to the Mafia; I met another white chap (I have no idea of his descent) who is a high-level executive in a large banking firm. Add to this the mix of Japanese, Koreans, Chinese, Latinos, Europeans, and on and on. As far as I could tell, this church was very much a reflection of the demographics of the borough.

Does this mean that these two churches are more spiritual than their more monolithic counterparts in the Midwest? I doubt it. I was overjoyed to visit them. But both churches reflected the demographics of their respective areas, and in those parts of the country there is a lot more "mixing" already going on in the culture. Some of this, doubtless, is a very good thing: it can ease tensions, add rich diversity to a church, and prove to be a witness to others.

On the other hand, one suspects that some of the mixing is achieved in the culture at large, as well as in the local church, by the "flattening" of cultural or racial distinctives. Japanese and Mexicans may intermarry in California because in some circles (though certainly not all), the preservation of distinctively Japanese and Mexican heritages seems less urgent, less important. The enrichment of the common pool is sometimes at the expense of preserving the distinctiveness of the separate inherited cultures. However much we may admire the peace, we would be less than candid if we did not admit that something is being lost by this bargain. In other words, thoughtful Christians will surely hesitate before they adopt without reservation some Christianized version of the "melting pot" model. There is something lost in each of the contributing subcultures, as well as something gained in the new mix, by the "flattening" that has made the mix more socially acceptable.

Moreover, precisely because these changes are demonstrably taking place in the broader culture, it is less than transparent that the churches are at the front end of such change. In some cases, at least, they are simply going along with the trajectory of the broader culture. Where that is the case, it is hard to see that a more integrated church is necessarily more spiritual than a less integrated church in a less integrated part of the country. Small wonder that in the Midwest a mixed-race couple may well feel it advisable to live in one of the suburbs where there is a good mix of their respective races so that their children have mixed exposure in the schools. Meanwhile, the latest census shows that the mix is spreading from the coasts across the country. Iowa is becoming a desirable place for Latinos and other immigrants. Granted the demographic trends, churches that are trying to think these things through should be planning ahead for what the demographics of their area will be like in six months, a year, five years—and while they evaluate their Christian responsibilities in the light of Scripture, they had better take note of such trends.

Not for a moment am I suggesting that no racism operates in our churches. Moreover, to have a truly integrated church (reflecting the demographic profile of the neighborhood in which it is found) takes hard work, very substantial forbearance, self-sacrificing winsomeness, patience—in a word, love. But the issues are complex, and the relationships between the culture and the local church have many layers. There is an urgent need for fresh biblical and theological reflection on many of these questions.

Step 4: Consider the Real Gospel Tensions

In thinking about race, we must not only become aware of churches that have achieved more integration than usual, but to think through how highly diverse patterns in various parts of the world may inform our own theological reflection. In other words, one of the things that would help us, I suspect, in addition to exegetical and theological meditation on the love and forgiveness themes being treated in this series of lectures, is consideration of churches where the patterns are rather different. These different patterns have no normative value in themselves, of course, but they might open our eyes to different ways of doing things.

Thankfully, there are now some helpful books that expose us to various fruitful models of multiethnic ministry within this country.[7] We might also cast a glance abroad. For example, a church I know in Australia has over the past quarter-century developed about eighteen or nineteen "congregations" within the one "church," and almost half of them are ethnic. The senior minister has sought out young converts of distinctive ethnic backgrounds at the nearby university and helped to train them and put them through theological college. Thus a student with roots in Greece was soon evangelizing the considerable Greek-speaking population in the area, and a Greek-speaking congregation was started. In similar fashion, Cantonese, Mandarin, Korean, and other congregations were started. Is this zeal somehow a betrayal of the New Testament goal to build one church?

Before deciding, one must remember that there are other New Testament goals—goals which, like the passion for unity, are motivated by love. In particular, consider the passion for evangelism, the concern to win people from every tribe and people and nation. Very frequently this is most effectively and strategically done in the language and culture of the targeted group. In this particular church, the elders/leaders of the diverse congregations work together, strategize together, and pray together as a team. The children of ethnic parents may well end up in one of the more Anglo congregations. The rising mix in that particular part of Sydney means that interracial marriages are becoming more common.

Clearly there is a tension here—a tension between building one church that displays Christian love, and the Christian love that reaches out to people in all their diversity. That tension is already found in the pages of the New Testament. The same apostle Paul who refused in Jerusalem to permit Titus to be circumcised because he thought that the heart of the gospel was at stake (Gal. 2:1-5), and who was passionately committed to the unity of the church (e.g., Eph. 4:1-3), was quite prepared to circumcise Timothy because he wanted to knock down any obstruction to the promulgation of the gospel in Jewish circles (Acts 16:3).[8] To a cynical outsider, this might look like cheap compromise, raw pragmatism, or an unprincipled desire to please different people (see the charge leveled against Paul in Galatians 1:10). In fact, competing principles are at stake, competing goals, both rightly driven ideally by Christian love. But it is Christian love in service of the Christian gospel, well understood and articulated.

There are plenty of other models. São Paulo is a city of enormous interest in this regard because of its staggering mix of races and cultures and some of the ecclesiastical patterns that are beginning to develop. When such patterns are carefully thought through in the light of the biblical mandates, the path of love, which includes not only love for the "other" expressed within the church, but also strategic effectiveness in evangelism to see people from diverse backgrounds converted, may look a little different in different parts of the country, in different parts of the world, in different cultures and subcultures.

None of this should be an excuse for doing nothing, for remaining stagnant in one's own comfort zones, for moral lethargy. The point is that globalization, like many a cultural development, can have both good and bad effects. It can breed a sad "flattening" of rich cultural diversity. That flattening in turn can breed a number of defensive postures in which everything in "my" culture assumes an unwarranted importance, and globalization is nothing but a threat. But a global perspective can also expose us to different points of view, to different ways of tackling things, to different models. Provided these are set within the nonnegotiables of the gospel, they can only enrich us, teach us humility, expand our horizons, and help us to worship all the more knowledgeably and fervently the God who so loves diversity that he promises to gather men and women from every tongue and tribe and people and nation.

Step 5: Think Biblically & Theologically

The previous four articles suggest that we need to engage in some mature theological reflection. Precisely because the issues are so complex (a complexity on which I have barely touched), all the greater urgency attends the need for Christians to think biblically and theologically. Otherwise we will be driven by faddishness, slogans, or mere pragmatics.

Here are a few of the theological foci that must control Christian reflection.

JUSTICE AND FORGIVENESS

First, we must not pit justice against forgiveness but humbly attend both demands.

A few years ago one of my colleagues was lecturing at an evening class made up entirely of African-American students. All of them held down jobs during the day; in the evening they were trying to get some Bible and theology to enable them better to serve their local churches. My colleague was lecturing on the night that the TV networks first showed the beating of Rodney King by the L.A. police. The students were seething with rage. My colleague encouraged them to talk about their own experiences of suffering racism. All of them had bitter stories to tell. This cauldron of barely suppressed anger simmered for almost an hour. Then my colleague asked the question, "What theological principles should we be thinking about as we face up to racism?" Everyone in the class almost exploded with the answer: "Justice! Justice!"

My colleague then asked, "And what biblical passages do you have in mind?" No one could mention a single one. Certainly no one mentioned forgiveness, and no one mentioned the cross.

On the other hand, many a white church in a mixed-race community is full of people who honestly think they are above racism and yet who have never once fully tried to understand what it would be like for a black family to come into their church. "Of course they're welcome," these fine folk might protest. "Anyone is welcome here." But all it takes is for one member to say something really insensitive, and all of the courage it took to walk in the door dissolves in disgust and a sense of victimization. Would a white member who indulged in such condescending malice face church discipline? Would the black newcomers be invited to white homes and treated as peers? And if there are economic disparities as well, would there be any reflection on the fact that some white/black economic disparity is a function of years of discrimination that, morally speaking, ought to be vehemently opposed by concerned Christians?[9] Moreover, if the black couple visiting the white church has a teenage boy who asks a white girl out on a date, what will be the response? And if such white believers were brought into a room and asked what the fundamental theological issues should be that govern their reflection on such matters, would they with one voice instantly and vehemently insist, "Justice! Justice!"?

I don't know what they would answer. I suspect that there would be such diversity of opinion that unanimity would be impossible. I imagine that very few would begin with the cross.

And do not all these issues become all the more complicated when white Christians are berated or berate themselves for segregation with respect to African-American churches, and then justify the "rights" of Chinese-Americans to have their "own" churches and to exert communal pressures to prevent one of their daughters from dating a white lad?

I doubt that we shall improve much in Christian circles until the parties with the most power reflect a lot more than in the past on matters of justice, and the parties most victimized reflect a lot more than in the past on forgiveness.[10] Perhaps the former need to get down on their knees and read Amos; the latter need to get down on their knees and read 1 Peter. All of us need to return to the cross. For the cross teaches us that if all we ask for is justice, we are all damned; it teaches us that God himself is

passionately interested in forgiveness and its price. That is why we cannot expect such responses from large swaths of the secular society, whose categories for redressing social evils, real and perceived, lie elsewhere. Among Christians to expect anything less is to betray the faith.

Both justice and forgiveness cry out for more examination even if there is little space for it here.

On the side of justice: Most discussions recognize the distinction between retributive justice and distributional justice—the justice that punishes the miscreant and the justice that tackles structural evils that control and manipulate the weak. Amos is certainly concerned with both. If Christians in power are concerned with issues of justice, they had better not sacrifice either pole. We may, of course, gropingly disagree, for example, on what the wisest and most effective changes in structure should be. Should we levy more taxes and entrust the government with the responsibility to redistribute wealth and change the social structures by legislation? Or have many of these experiments in fact generated a large and dependent underclass, making it a wiser course to reform economic injustices by other means? But whatever our disagreements on the pragmatic outworkings of justice, the passion for justice must characterize all who claim to serve a just God. None of this will be easy work. But love demands that we try—and we had better be more interested in effective results than in the slogans of the party faithful.

On the side of forgiveness: We have already seen that the most desirable forms of forgiveness are those that are tied to genuine reconciliation, but that Christians bear a responsibility and a privilege to forgive enemies even when the enemy is unwilling to be reconciled or remains unaware of the depth of the offense that he or she has caused. None of this forgiveness will be easy. But whatever our disagreements about the relationships between forgiveness that is carefully nurtured in one's heart and mind and the practical outworkings of such forgiveness, the passion to forgive must characterize all who claim to serve a forgiving God.

CREATION AND THE FALL

Second, we must reflect on both creation and the fall. Creation tells us that the human race was made *imago Dei*, in the image of God (Gen. 1:27). From the first man and woman came every nation of human beings (Acts 17:26). If there is but one God, he is God of all, recognized or unrecognized, known or unknown, and salvation comes from him alone (Rom. 3:29-30). God invested in the first human pair a genetic potential for astonishing diversity—in exactly the same way that God invested in original dogs the genetic potential for astonishing diversity. Apparently God delights in diversity; we should, too.

The fall did not introduce mere sins; it introduced the "fallenness" that is endemic to every human being. God is no longer at the center of every one of us; each of us wants to be at the center, to have a domesticated God (in other words, a false god, an idol). Such idolatry means that we seek to control not only our own lives but in some measure the lives of all who touch us. This massive de-godding of God, this odious idolatry, works out in countless sins of every description. It includes oppression on the one hand and nurtured resentments on the other—and both feed into what we call racism. Idolatry means we are so selfish most of the time that most of us do not automatically think in terms of sacrificial service. If idolatry produces tyrants whose chief lust is to control, it also produces populist demagogues whose chief lust is to control—and both of them will entertain mixed motives, confusing their genuine desire to do good among their own people with their transparent lust for power. Because almost all sin has social ramifications, the biases, hatreds, resentments, nurtured feelings of inferiority and superiority, anger, fear, sense of entitlement—all are passed on in corrosive ways to new generations.

These two poles, creation and the fall, must be thought about together. There is more than a little danger that we will try to reverse the effects of racism by talking endlessly about human rights, about human dignity, about inherent human freedom. Great insight lies in all of these themes. If they are cut free from other biblical teaching, however, they tend to foster the lust for human autonomy that lies at the very heart of the fall. The desire to be free from God can also produce a Nietzsche, a Stalin, a Hitler, a Mao Zedong, a Pol Pot. The heart of the Christian message is not that human beings are made in the image of God and therefore must be set free to be autonomous. The heart of the Christian message is that although human beings, made in the image of God, created by him and for him, have catapulted themselves into a squalid revolution with disastrous consequences, God himself has taken action to reconcile them to himself. When they become reconciled to God, they are set free in principle from sin—not in order to become completely autonomous, but to return to the God who made them and who owns them.

That is why the Bible can repeatedly depict believers as being slaves of God, slaves of Christ.^[11] The first human pair before the fall were slaves of God in the very best sense. He owned them. Doubtless they were to do his bidding, but that bidding was always immaculately wise and good. They thought their rebellion would bring them freedom, would make them like God himself, but it merely brought them into a new slavery, a slavery as different from the initial slavery as darkness is from light. Our freedom from this infinitely odious slavery—slavery to self, to sin, to Satan—is achieved not by becoming utterly autonomous, but by being restored to the first slavery. We are Christ's; we were made by him and for him (Col. 1:15-20); we are his not only by creation but by redemption. We have been bought with a price, and we are not our own (1 Cor. 6:20).

What is this but another way of saying that the salvation granted in the gospel restores us to the place where we begin to cherish what it means to love God with heart and soul and mind and strength and our neighbors as ourselves?

THE CROSS OF CHRIST

Third, never should we forget the centrality of the cross or the power of the gospel. I am referring not only to the importance of forgiveness in the Christian message (for I have said enough about that for the moment), but I am referring also to the fact that the New Testament documents teach us that the death and resurrection of Jesus secured for his people all the blessings of the gospel—all the way up to and including the resurrection existence of the new heaven and the new earth. Although the consummation of those blessings still lies in the future, already we enjoy more than judicial pardon and the experience of forgiveness. The cross not only cancels sin, but it breaks sin's power. As the hymn writer puts it, "He breaks the power of canceled sin / He sets the prisoner free."

That is why a passage such as Ephesians 2 not only assures us that we have been saved by grace through faith (2:7), but that God has "made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions" (2:5). Indeed, "we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (2:10). The ensuing verses work out the "Therefore" of verse 11: because Christ Jesus himself is our "peace"—not only our peace with God but the "peace" that brings together Jews and Gentiles in a new humanity, holding together as one people, having "access to God by one Spirit" (2:18)—Christians cannot think of their salvation in exclusively legal or individualistic terms. We constitute a new humanity, the humanity of the last times, for by the cross God put to death the hostility that engulfed us (2:16). To be satisfied with anything less than this high vision is to betray the gospel.

That is also why Paul's letter to Philemon demands that Christians transcend the categories of justice and forgiveness. True, Paul wants Philemon to forgive Onesimus, the runaway slave who had stolen some of his master's property. Indeed Paul offered to pay back the property loss himself (v. 19). But the thrust of his appeal to Philemon is that he ought to accept the converted Onesimus as "a dear brother," "a brother in the Lord" (v. 16). "So if you consider me a partner," Paul writes to Philemon, "welcome him as you would welcome me" (v. 17). The gospel extends to these fundamentally relational categories, which go beyond matters of justice and forgiveness narrowly conceived. And once again, to be satisfied with anything less than this high vision is to betray the gospel.

THINKING ESCHATOLOGICALLY

Fourth, this transformation is not accomplished all at once. The eschatological dimension to our salvation means that the perfection toward which we press and for which we are responsible is not going to be perfectly achieved until the dawning of the new heaven and the new earth.

The practical consequences are considerable. On the one hand, we must never appeal to the consummation that is not yet attainable in order to justify moral lethargy now. On the other hand, we must exercise forbearance and forgiveness toward fellow believers who are still far from perfect, for not only are we, too, in the same state, but we must all give an account to our heavenly Father, whose judgment on the final day will be just.

On the one hand, Christ has died and risen again; we have been justified and regenerated; there is no excuse for sin. Moreover, because of these great realities, Christians have a new perspective: we are no longer to view anyone from a worldly point of view (2 Cor. 5:16). We are already new creatures; the old has gone, the new has come. "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation . . . : Be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:18-20).[12]

On the other hand, Christ has not yet returned; God has not finished with us yet. The perfection toward which we press ought to be an incentive to slip the shackles of the vision of those whose horizons are more limited. At the same time, however, we neither promise nor expect any utopia to arrive before then. Neither Marxist visions of the "new man" nor the hopes of liberal democracies, still less the naiveté of liberal education theory (have some people forgotten how good German universities were on the eve of World War II?), can cure the evil ingrained in all of us.

So we must struggle on, never satisfied with what we have achieved (cf. Phil. 3:12-13), and yet quietly realistic and never embittered about the tensions we face as we live between the "already" and the "not yet."

AN OUTPOST IN TIME

Fifth, the church is the only institution that will survive this world and continue to exist in all of its perfected splendor in the next. That means that the church is supposed to be an outpost in time of what it will one day be in eternity. We are part of the

cultures in which we find ourselves; we exist in time, in this fallen order, in this created and fallen order. But we also belong to the heavenly realms (see esp. Eph. 1:3, 20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12), and we hunger for what we will become. The gospel does not only declare us forgiven. It forges for us a new reality in which we already participate, the new reality of the dawning of the new age, the coming of the kingdom, the formation of the new humanity. And though we are not yet what we will be, and to our shame we are not even what we should be, yet by the grace of God we are not what we were, and by that same grace we learn to live with eternity's values in view.

Our dual citizenship means that we simultaneously reflect our own cultures and are called to be light and salt in these cultures. We belong; yet we do not belong. This means we must return to Scripture again and again in every generation to think through what elements of our culture are to be cherished, or at least not opposed, and what elements are evil and in need of reformation or overthrow. Truth to tell, very often the two are so intertwined that separation is not always easy. We must embrace both of our citizenships. Only when they overtly conflict do we give absolute precedence to our heavenly citizenship. We belong to two cities, and even if one of them is passing away, at the moment we cannot escape this duality. Christian discipleship necessarily works itself out in this tension. The same Christians who have been taught to pray, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven," also cry, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus."

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ENDNOTES

1-See his *Migrations and Cultures: A World View* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), and especially his *Race and Culture: A World View* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), not least chap. 7, "Race and Slavery."

2-See, *inter alia*, Ralph A. Austen, "The Trans-Saharan Slave Trade: A Tentative Census," in *Uncommon Market: Essays in the Economic History of the Atlantic Slave Trade*, ed. Henry A. Gemery and Jan S. Hogendorn (New York: Academic Press, 1979), 68-69; Reginald Coupland, *The Exploitation of East Africa 1856-1890: The Slave Trade and the Scramble* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1967), 148; nicely summarized in Thomas Sowell, *Race and Culture*, esp. 188, 208.

3-Eventually other European powers joined in the ban, enforcing it both at home and in their colonial domains, prompting Thomas Sowell (*Race and Culture*, 222) to write, "More specifically, it was European imperialism which stamped out slavery over most of the world. The last nation to abolish slavery officially was Mauritania, on 5 July, 1980, though the practice continued after the ban—as it still does in several parts of the world today."

4-The point is rightly made, though somewhat overstated, by Frank M. Snowden, Jr., in his book *Before Color Prejudice: The Ancient View of Blacks* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983).

5-Although this is true, strictly speaking, we do well to recall other groups of people who for a considerable period of time were indentured workers treated little better than slaves. One thinks, for instance, of the tens of thousands of Chinese "coolies" who labored to build American railroads.

6-This change has drawn a great deal of comment. Popular sociology often refers to the first model, usually now with a good deal of disparagement, as the "melting-pot model": all the ingredients lose their individual identities in the stew. The primary alternative often calls forth a "salad-bowl image": each ingredient keeps its distinctive taste and yet contributes to the integrated flavor of the entire dish. Images aside, commentators increasingly recognize that the latter model can easily generate unseemly one-upmanship and foster discord and isolationism. Seeking a mediating pattern, some have tried to carve

out a special domain of integration in the public sphere: see, for instance, Clarence Walhout, "Literature, Christianity, and the Public Sphere," *Christian Scholar's Review* 29 (1999), 361-373. Discussions are ongoing, but in my view public and private spheres are not so easily sealed off from each other.

7-See especially Manuel Ortiz, *One New People: Models for Developing a Multiethnic Church* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996).

8-There are, of course, additional factors in this example since the "cultural" barrier of the circumcision law is deeply tied to the Old Testament Scriptures that both Paul and his non-Christian Jewish contemporaries shared. In other words, a different interpretation of canonical Scripture is at stake, not a cultural item unmentioned in Scripture.

9-I must add in passing that the latest statistics show that when stable black family incomes are compared with stable white family incomes, and when a fudge factor is introduced to allow for the fact that more black families live in the South than in the North (where incomes are higher—though often expenses are, too), there is no statistical difference between the two groups.

Of course, there is still a large difference between black mean income and white mean income because these figures are based on individuals, and there are far more single parents among blacks than among whites—which itself owes a great deal to complex and sometimes profoundly reprehensible social pressures.

10-One of the most moving stories I know in this regard is the account of Ruby Bridges, the six-year-old African-American girl who in 1960 for an entire academic year was protected when she entered and exited a white school after court-ordered integration. Under pressure from the jeering white adults who screamed hate-filled abuse at her every day, she was observed one day to be talking—her lips were moving. "I wasn't talking to them," she explained. "I was praying for them." The story has been told many times (see her own account at www.rubybridges.org/story). "Usually I prayed in the car on the way to school, but that day I'd forgotten until I was in the crowd. Please be with me, I'd asked God, and be with those people too. Forgive them because they don't know what they're doing." Ruby's account faithfully reflects on the hatred and fear of people, both black and white, who wanted the Bridges to stop their action; and on the help they received, from both black and white, and not least from her white teacher, Mrs. Barbara Henry, who poured herself into her one first-year pupil, Ruby, all that year and who was let go by the school at the end of that year.

11-The book to read is Murray J. Harris, *Slave of Christ: A New Testament Metaphor for Total Devotion to Christ*, NSBT 8 (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1999)—who gives lists of passages, noting that our common English translations use "servants" on occasion where the right translation is "slaves." For example, "slave(s)" should be used in all of the following passages: Acts 2:18; 4:29; 16:17; Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:10; Eph. 6:6; Phil. 1:1; 1 Pet. 2:16; Rev. 2:20; 7:3; 19:2, 5.

12-In contemporary Christian literature, it is far too common to interpret Paul's "ministry of reconciliation" as if it were peacemaking on the largest scale. Doubtless the Scriptures lay on believers such large-scale peacemaking, but Paul's focus in this passage is on the reconciliation between God and his image-bearers who are wretchedly alienated from him. In a word, his focus is on evangelism.

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Pastoring a Multi-Ethnic Church

By John Folmar

On any given Friday morning, you will find more than fifty different nationalities represented at our church gatherings. (Our church founders established the weekly meetings on Friday to accord with a Muslim working week.) The United Christian Church of Dubai (UCCD) gathers in the midst of a sea of Islam and materialism in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, a small oil-rich nation that borders Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf.

People come from literally all over the world to work in Dubai. Our members have come from all over Africa, throughout the Middle East, up into Central Asia and stretching eastward to Japan and Taiwan, then southward to Singapore and Indonesia, and still further south in Australia and New Zealand. Our westerners hail from South America, up through the Caribbean islands, then further north into Mexico, the U.S. and Canada, then across the Atlantic and all over Europe. The lure of lucre draws them from everywhere. You can imagine the challenges this poses to pastoring.

GOSPEL UNITY

What have I learned pastoring a multi-ethnic church? Most importantly, I have learned that for all the cultural and racial issues that divide us—and there are many—our shared knowledge of Christ Jesus as Lord transcends them all. We are, for all our diversity, sons and daughters of Adam and Eve, in need of the one remedy that only Jesus could secure: redemption, the forgiveness of sins. We have received Christ and together become "one new man" through the new creation begun in him (Eph. 3:15).

As a result, our congregation shares rich times of corporate worship and deep cross-cultural relationships that only Christ could have secured. If the church is to be a "colony of heaven," then we regularly experience foretastes of that "great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages" (Rev. 7:9).

DESTROYING MUSLIM MISCONCEPTIONS

Our multi-cultural congregation has the potential to be a potent witness for the power and truth of Christianity. In the Muslim world, "Christianity" is strongly associated with the West, particularly with the United States, and more particularly with Hollywood. Christians are morally suspect, to say the least.

Therefore, when I tell local Muslims that our congregation consists of Middle Easterners, South Asians, Central Asians, East Asians, and more, they are surprised. Which is fine. But my hope is that their surprise will turn into intrigue and even interest in the Truth that binds us together as they experience the fellowship among believers who share nothing in common except Christ. That's why I emphasize church membership in our diverse congregation. To the extent that we self-consciously commit to covenant together, we have the potential to be a 3-dimensional display of God's glory. Nowhere else in the Middle East do fifty nationalities come together like this. It only happens in the churches of Jesus Christ!

Evangelism in the Middle East—and everywhere else—should not occur only through the individual, but through the congregation as a whole. Our church's goal is to be a catalyst for revival in our region through our gospel proclamation and through our corporate witness of love—rooted in the forgiveness we've received in Christ (John 13:35; 1 John 4:11).

CHALLENGES TO MULTI-ETHNIC MINISTRY

To be sure, our diverse cultures present unique challenges at UCCD. (Pray for us!) Here are just a few:

1. Maintaining a Rigorous Biblical Ministry

In a multi-ethnic context, it's extremely difficult to maintain a rigorously biblical ministry. With believers coming to us from so many different denominations and cultural backgrounds, whose expectations should govern? Whose ministry philosophy do we adopt?

Difficult Doctrine. I fear that many "international churches" have earned the reputation of being lowest-common-denominator ministries. The level of diversity in a multi-ethnic context leads many of these churches or their leaders to dumb down doctrine. There is not a church on every corner in Dubai, the argument goes, and so we must pursue a policy of theological rapprochement and avoid controversial truths.

For example, I was preaching on election from 1 Peter 1:1, and someone commented afterward that our church should avoid doctrinal controversies and "stick to the basics." I couldn't accept that advice, though. Not only does the text contain the doctrine of election, but also: if God is not sovereign in everything from election to glorification, I'm packing up and going home! The obstacles to evangelism in the Muslim world are simply too great.

If Paul had not been convinced of individual election, he too would have left Corinth (see Acts 18:9-11).

Membership. Another example is church membership. Among our congregation, neither our Sydney Anglicans, nor our African Pentecostals, nor our Indian high-churchmen have historically practiced church membership, which admittedly has been a Baptist hallmark. So what should we do? We should search the Scriptures and conform our practices to biblical norms. Everywhere church discipline is mentioned in the New Testament, there (by implication) is church membership. It was practiced in the first century (2 Cor. 2:6), and we should practice it today.

Multi-ethnic ministers must seek, by God's grace—not the latest fashion in market-evangelicalism—but the Bible's guidelines on how to conduct ourselves in the household of God (1 Tim. 3:15). The New Testament actually has much to say about conducting ourselves corporately. To be sure, we must exercise wisdom to know when an issue of governance or church order is culture-bound, and when it is normative for the Christian life according to the Scriptures. But this argues for a more rigorous adherence to the text, not less.

2. Resisting the Prevailing Winds of Evangelicalism

From my perch in Dubai, I am shocked at how wide-spread is the superficial, nominal evangelicalism that takes its soundings from outward success and seeker sensitivity. David Wells in *No Place For Truth* targeted the "marketing ethos" prevalent in American evangelicalism. But his thesis could now easily be applied globally. A quick look at the books on display in the Bible Society in the Persian Gulf will amply prove the case. Benny Hinn, Brian McLaren, T. D. Jakes—they're all there for the taking. People around the world increasingly read the same books.

In a multi-cultural environment, it's easy to be blown along by the prevailing theological winds. In the West, churches benefit from generations of denominational reflection on theological issues. So in Arabia, where we don't possess such a pedigree, we must carefully evaluate the latest fads.

3. Keeping the Main Thing the Main Thing

The sheikhs here in the United Arab Emirates have not yet permitted further church planting in "their" country. (Pray that they would!) Therefore, since only a relative handful of churches meet here, we at UCCD are forced to grow together amid many cultures and even denominational backgrounds. This is potentially a good thing for the gospel.

Yet it's also wise to learn how to distinguish between primary and secondary issues. Primary issues concern the gospel. Secondary issues are of lesser importance, and we must allow some leeway in a multi-ethnic setting, especially one in a restricted access country where church planting is not allowed legally. It is a matter of wisdom, of course, to distinguish between what is primary and what is secondary. I'm still working those out myself, and hoping the guys at [Together for the Gospel](#) can help.

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Many Ethnicities, One Race

By Thabiti Anyabwile

Perhaps the longest running conversation between Blacks and Whites in America is a conversation about race. It's a conversation that started in 1619 in Jamestown, Virginia as slavery and the trans-Atlantic slave trade began. The conversation moved through the Civil War, through Reconstruction, through Jim Crow segregation, and into the Civil Rights movement. And the conversation continues today in battles over affirmative action, racial profiling, and other problems in an increasingly diverse nation. In all of these conversations, the topic is "race." Everyone talks about "race." Lurking behind all this controversy and influencing our very identities are notions of "race."

From time to time this discussion of race has been theological in nature. The Civil War, as historian Mark Noll recently pointed out, could be understood as a theological crisis. [1] When both the opponents and advocates of slavery raised the question of African humanity, a theological anthropology was in view. One part of that crisis involved disputes over "race." When the "brotherhood of man" became a favorite slogan for many African-American leaders and some social gospelers in the Civil War's aftermath of Reconstruction, [2] a theological anthropology was pressed into the service of social and political causes.

But this ongoing conversation about race raises several questions. First, if race is a matter of theological anthropology, why has there been so little contemporary theological reflection on race? Perhaps more importantly, it's worth asking if this idea of "race" is even biblical? I'm not sure it is. And if it's not a biblical idea, we're forced to ask whether the very way in which we think about "race" as a category is itself a product of the Fall.

My hope is that as we consider these foundational issues, we will become better at talking about the uncomfortable topic of race, and maybe even discover why our competency for handling racial problems isn't much better today than it was in 1619 or 1925.

SYSTEMATIC SILENCE

Does the gospel of Jesus Christ have anything to say regarding how we're to understand race? A survey of several prominent and otherwise useful systematic theologies suggests, "No, Jesus and the gospel are silent on race and race-related issues." Not one of the popular systematic theologies I consulted for this article included an entry for "race" or "ethnicity" in their indexes. Several authors do briefly touch on the topic of race. William Shedd and R. D. Culver list the "racial solidarity" of humanity in sin in their indexes. [3] Wayne Grudem includes references to racial equality in the church, the gospel call to all racial groups, the *imago Dei* giving all races dignity, and racial equality in Christ. [4] For his part, James Montgomery Boice calls Christians to speak out against "racism" and to oppose what he called the "secular church" and its gospel-eclipsing agenda. [5]

Charles Hodge, writing during a time when the racist attitudes that Grudem and Boice rightly lament were near their peak, refutes the "anti-scriptural theories" of man's evolutionary origins in chapter one of his systematic theology, but then he hardly addresses the "race question." Shedd's attention to race is worse still. He includes supplemental notes that approvingly cite Agassiz' contention that it is "ever so abundantly demonstrated that [the African race] was but an improved species of ape and [Europeans] a degenerate kind of God." [6] We may conclude that major theologians in the Reformed tradition have largely either been silent or unhelpful on the issue of race and humanity.

Turning to monographs devoted to theological anthropology is no more encouraging. Anthony Hoekema understands the importance of the doctrine of man and asks a number of pertinent questions about helping Christians face the "pressing problems of today's world," but then he fails to answer them in the rest of his book, at least on the topic of race. [7] Two recent volumes which offer theological and philosophical discussions of human being and personal identity are likewise silent on race and ethnicity. [8]

Few are the number of thinkers like Douglas R. Sharp who address at some length the issue of race as an important topic for theological reflection and concludes that "both race and racism are deeply embedded in our social and cultural lives, that they have been working for a long time to shape American national history as well as our personal and communal identities, and that on all counts they are *wrong*." Sharp continues, "race and racism challenge Christian faith and contradict the gospel of Jesus Christ because they are expressions of human sin." [9] May his tribe increase.

For the most part, systematic reflections on race have been the province of ethnic minorities and volumes on "racial reconciliation." [10] And judging from that literature, at the end of nearly 2,000 years of theological reflection, basic questions still abound. Where are we when it comes to understanding what it means to be human? Is our "race"—in the sense that idea is used—in any way essential to that understanding? Should it be?

In my opinion—humble, I pray—we have a ways to go yet. But the way forward may involve such a renewing of the mind that our generation may balk and remain silent like many of our theological heroes did. Nonetheless, there is an opportunity for us if we have faith and courage enough to seize it. We may for the first time be able to advance a theological anthropology that biblically and thoroughly answers the "race question" and thus provides the church and her leaders with handlebars for steering through what has been a theological, social, and political quagmire for nearly four centuries.

IMAGE, BODY, AND CULTURE: UNITY IN ADAM

The obvious place to start in constructing a doctrine of man is with Scripture, and in the beginning with the Genesis account.

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them (Gen. 1:26-27).

Man, male and female, is made in the image of God. Historically, great Christian minds have wrestled with precisely what this image consists of. Generally speaking, theologians understand the image to include certain rational, spiritual, moral, governmental, or ruling capacities and functions. Some have also distinguished between "broader" and "narrower" senses in which man bears the image of God. The "broader" sense refers to those ways in which man continues to image God after the Fall, as with man's intellectual capacity, spirituality, moral agency, and natural affections. The "narrower" sense refers to those ways in which man does not continue to image God after the fall, as with God's perfect righteousness, holiness, and knowledge. [11]

Bodily Solidarity with Adam

Few have given much attention to the image and its relationship to bodily characteristics. Some who do will focus on the body as the "home" for the soul and the means through which other capacities are exercised. Culver is unequivocal: "The whole of man, soul and body, is 'in the image of God' and 'according to his likeness,'" even if not every aspect or part of the human being is in the image of God in the same manner. [12] I don't think we have to get caught up in the debate over the precise relationship between body and soul in order to affirm that we humans image God *bodily*. Our in-God's-image existence is embodied and biological.

From there, it's necessary for us to observe the biological unity of all humankind. As Louis Berkhoff writes, "Scripture teaches that the whole human race descended from one pair." He continued,

the subsequent narrative in Genesis clearly shows that the following generations down to the time of the flood stood in unbroken genetic relation with the first pair, so that the human race constitutes not only a specific unity, a unity in the sense that all men share the same human nature, but also a genetic or genealogical unity. This is also taught by Paul in Acts 17:26, "And God made of one every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth." [13]

We may safely conclude that insofar as genealogy is concerned, the Bible plainly records that there is only one race. With regard to bodily properties like skin color, we may also conclude that, though differences exist, all people are made in the image of God—male and female; black, brown, and white; red-haired and black-haired. There is nothing about bodily distinctions that either disrupt the organic or genetic unity of humanity (Acts 17:26) or obscures the image of God in some groups with certain biological properties.

Strictly speaking, the Scripture knows nothing of our contemporary notion of "races." People may have different skin color (or hair color), but they do not therefore belong to different "races." The idea of "races" is, therefore, a fiction. There is but one human race descended from one parentage, all of whom are created in the image of God spiritually, rationally, morally, and bodily. (Hereafter, I will use "race" or "races" in quotations to refer to the common notion of multiple races rooted in biological differences, and the term race without quotations to refer to the biblical teaching of one humanity descended from Adam.)

The Problem with Systematic Silence

What does that mean for our theology? It would seem that an adequate theological anthropology must deny that "races" rooted in differences like skin-color is in any way a reality—that "races" don't exist. Differing skin colors? Sure. Different races?

No. But strangely, my admittedly limited survey of the anthropological literature suggests that few theologians have walked to this logical conclusion, and even fewer have been so inclusive in their definition of humanity "made in the image of God" as to include specific reference to skin color as a marker of race. [14] Rare are the theologians like Hodge who carry out their discussion of the unity of the human race against the explicitly-stated backdrop of race relations or questions about race. [15]

In light of the sparse references to race as skin color in the Bible, this general silence in the systematics would ordinarily not be a problem. If the Bible doesn't give much attention to the idea of "race as skin color," why should our theologies? The answer, of course, is that our theological anthropologies are not developed in a historical vacuum, but in a context prejudiced against sound biblical thinking on this topic. [16] We're left pondering the question: How are we to think about "race" (skin color) given the organic unity of humankind? The omission is problematic, then, because (i) the contemporary conversations about "race" assume a biological definition, or at least assume that "race" is phenotypically identifiable (skin color); (ii) the silence leaves room for racial assumptions that are not biblical; and (iii) the silence allows for social constructions and actions rooted in mistaken notions of personal and group identity.

To state these problems in another way, we could say that our allegiance to "races" is a form of idolatry [17] (if not poor mental health). They are constructs inherited from the alienation produced by the Fall. We build them, and then they shape us (Ps. 115:8). But just as "an idol is nothing at all in the world" (1 Cor. 8:4), so too "races" are nothing. Therefore, the first step forward in advancing a new anthropology is to affirm the negative—that there is no such thing as "races" as we have construed and practiced them.

Of Race and Culture

Insisting upon the genetic unity of humankind and denying the reality of "races" only gets us so far. Though our contemporary notion of "races" is foreign to Scripture, diverse cultures and ethnicities are not. "Ethnicity" is a fluid construct comprised of nationality, language, culture, and sometimes religion. Unlike "races," ethnic differences are observable and real. So, for example, my administrative assistant, Meg, and one of our faithful church members, Hugh Chin-Sinn, are proud Jamaicans. They share nationality, language (patois), and cultural patterns, but Meg is white and Hugh is black. Conversely, both Edwin Machingambi and I are black, have African names, and speak a bit of the same language (Swahili), but we are not ethnically of the same group. Edwin is Zimbabwean and I am an American nationally, culturally, etc. Ethnicity is an imperfect or fluid construct; however, it's more precise than "race". And as J. Daniel Hays points out, the ethnic diversity of the biblical world is far greater and much different than we imagine. [18]

So how are we to understand ethnic culture as it relates to humanity, the image of God, the gospel, and the church? This question requires a longer response than space here permits. But for now, it is important to establish that ethnic culture is not the image of God but is a product of that image.

Genesis 5:1-2 and 9:6 indicate that, after the Fall, man in some sense maintains the image of God. He has lost the perfect righteousness, holiness, and knowledge of God, but he remains a creature in God's image. Interestingly, it's during this period of ancient history that the development of human culture occurs. The implements and accidents of culture are scattered throughout the early record. Cain's children build cities (Gen. 4:17), begin animal husbandry (4:20), play music (4:21), and forge metals (4:22).

However, the development of human culture was not an amoral or neutral process. Culture, like humanity, is fallen and idolatrous. The development of culture led to the perversion of marriage (Gen. 4:19), murder and vengeance (4:23-24), universal wickedness (6:5, 12), and eventually the universal judgment of the flood (ch. 6). Fallen culture also finds expression in the families, geographic distribution, and language confusion following Babel (ch. 11).

There are at least two reasons why we must remember that human culture is a post-lapsarian development: (i) to prevent us from wrongly rooting human culture itself (as opposed to the capacity for cultural production) in the original creation of God, thereby making ethnic human culture seemingly unquestionable or intractable; and (ii) to prevent us from overlooking the fact that what God is doing in redemptive history, in part, is restoring his people to the full image of God and the culture of holiness, righteousness, and true knowledge befitting life in the image.

In other words, we have let our fallen cultural constructs of "race" over-determine who we are as individuals or groups. As Dave Unander observes: "Identity, an accurate and appropriate understanding of oneself, is often a casualty of racism and bigotry." [19] The damage to healthy, biblical identity occurs because we uncritically take real cultural differences, root them in an imagined and often idolatrous trait like "race," and proceed to engage the world on this basis. So much of our identity is rooted in a racialized and cultural self-understanding that the pillars of our persons would appear to tremble and collapse with any significant re-examination of the notion of "races" or fallen culture.

But conforming to a biblical standard is the only antidote for centuries of distortion, abuse, and neglect. To advance a theological anthropology that addresses and perhaps helps reverse the abuses and errors of earlier periods, we must

disentangle humanity (particularly redeemed humanity) from their productions (cultures). We must be able to say that the human being made in the image of God is something distinct from the culture he has created, and we must be able to jettison all of the cultural developments that are contrary to what it means to be human in the image of God. This represents for most of us a daunting risk of faith and spiritual renewal of the mind (Rom. 12:1-2).

THE CROSS, THE NEW HUMANITY, AND REDEEMED CULTURE: UNITY IN CHRIST

The fall of man into sin is the reason racial animosity, hatred, and divisions exist. Apart from the corruption of man and man's view of himself, God, and the world, we would not have witnessed the scale of misanthropy we have witnessed through the centuries. And this habit of racial thinking, hatred, and action belongs to the nature and disease of sin from which we need to be redeemed.

The question is, has God done anything about "race" and racism? (And it is both "race"—which is evidence of unbiblical thinking about man—and racism we should be concerned about.)

The Cross and the New Humanity

Perhaps the best place to see God's answer is the letters of Paul. There we find that God has indeed answered in Christ, and he has done something more profoundly wonderful than most people have imagined. Consider the apostle's words in Ephesians 2:13-17:

But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has *made us both one* and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law and commandments and ordinances, that he might *create in himself one new man in place of the two*, so making peace, and might *reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross*, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.

Here the apostle holds up for the church at Ephesus, which is comprised of both Jewish and Gentile believers, the implications of Christ's completed work for a doctrine of man. What's his main point in these verses? Through the completed work of Christ on the cross a new humanity is created, one involving all nations and making them into "one new man" through union with Christ. Christ has taken the old race of Adam and made them one new spiritual race or ethnicity. We are no longer Jews and Gentiles in the earthbound, fleshly, divisive, and hostile sense; we are now God's workmanship, a new nation and household, and a new creation (2 Cor. 5:17).

This new reality is something already accomplished by Christ. Notice the past tense action of Ephesians 2. Gentile and Jew "have been brought near"; Christ has "made us both one" and "has broken down" the wall of hostility dividing us. These past tense phrases refer back to the cross. The new humanity was created "by the blood of Christ," "in his flesh," "in one body on the cross." The new spiritual unity with Christ surpasses in glory and power the organic unity of Adam.

This unity with Christ entails the gradual recovery of the image of God lost in Eden (e.g. 2 Cor. 3:18). Because Jesus Christ is "the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature" (Heb. 1:3), the icon or "image of the invisible God" (Col. 1:15), those united to Christ are also being restored to the image and likeness of God. As Paul explains, this new humanity—these Christians—"have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator" (Col. 3:10; see also Eph. 4:22, 24). He goes on to write of this new humanity, "Here there is no Greek and Jew...but Christ is all, and in all" (Col. 3:11). Fundamentally the Christian individual's identity is grounded not in the old ideas of ethnicity and "race" but in the person and work of Christ Jesus. "We regard no one according to the flesh," and "all this is from God" (2 Cor. 5:16, 18).

Redeemed Culture

If our view of man rests not only on the organic unity we have with Adam but also on the spiritual unity Christians have in Christ, then we must be willing to jettison any ethnic-centered, divisive understanding of humanity we inherited from our fallen ancestors. If the contemporary idea of "race" belongs to the Fall, then it may rightly be considered one aspect of what Paul calls the "elementary principles of the world" (Gal. 4:3). How many of us grew up learning that "race" and all its entailments were part of the ABCs of how the world works?

But those "elementary principles" enslaved us. The apostle writes,

Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to those that by nature are not gods. But now that you have come to know God, or rather to be known by God, how can you turn back again to the weak and worthless elementary principles of the world, whose slaves you want to be once more? (Gal. 4:8-9).

The particular concerns Paul faced were ceremonial observances and the enslaving pull of the Law. But we may just as well include worldly views of "race" and culture among these elementary principles. "Race" is an idea that enslaves.

The good news is, Christ died for our freedom (Gal. 5:1). This means that not only does Christ achieve our redemption through the cross, he also provides the liberty to live according to a new divine culture. The apostle's words in Colossians 2 resound for our time:

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ. Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules...?

We must not submit our identities to human tradition and rules, because we are a new humanity living in a new culture. Having been freed by Christ, we regain the ability to be imitators of God (Eph. 5:1). The "new self" we are called to "put on" departs from the old practices and human traditions of Jews and Greeks. In this new culture of a new humanity, the most fundamental thing is to grow in Christ likeness and love for the ways of God. The character and word of God must define us. Human invention must not. Therefore, when we assume that ethnic cultures are morally "neutral," our cultural preferences and expressions will become seriously misdirected. As one theologian put it, "Theology as a reflex of cultural or racial identity can never really transform that identity." [20] Most likely, we all need to shed much more cultural and racial baggage than we realize.

Moreover, if Christ has purchased by his blood a new humanity for himself, we must not rely on any approach to "racial reconciliation" (technically, a misnomer) that either is not the gospel work of Christ or that equates racial reconciliation with the gospel. The gospel does something more glorious and profound than merely reconcile man to man, and it certainly does something more glorious than make cohabitation between former "racists" sufferable. By the power of God, the gospel first reconciles us to Christ. Then it remakes us in his image as one new humanity. And then it enables us to share a new and holy culture of godliness. In our failure to recognize Christ's work in this regard, we may be living beneath our inheritance, inadequately expositing the gospel work of Jesus, or worse, betraying that work by clutching the elementary principles of "race."

THE PENULTIMATE EXPRESSION OF THE WISDOM OF GOD: THE CHURCH

What does all this have to do with our corporate lives as Christians? Are there any implications for the local church?

There is an all-too-hasty conclusion that reconciliation and the new identity in Christ await fulfillment in the age to come. Many limit the teaching of Scripture on these points to the ultimate consummation of all things and skip over what the Bible's anthropology has to do with us today. That approach, it seems to me, is a mistake.

The failures at racial unity are glaring. But no less glaring is the need for Christ's work to shape and change our thinking and actions across ethnic lines now. The failures simultaneously remind us of our future hope and our present need. The fact that Sunday noon remains the most segregated hour in America teaches us that the sin of racial thinking is real.

We might be helped with our challenges at living out the new humanity in Christ by asking, "If there is one human race descended from Adam made in God's image and likeness, and if there is one new humanity being restored to the image and likeness in righteousness, holiness, and knowledge, where will this new humanity be displayed? Where is its home? Where is it lived out?"

The Bible's answer to these questions is "the church." Here, again, the impulse of some will be to draw a distinction between the "universal" church and the "local" church. And already having allowed for the worldly idea of "race" to create space in their thinking for division, many will conclude that "local church" and "mono-ethnic church" are synonyms. Some may insist that the "homogeneous unit principle" is not only permissible but best in building the church, while others may adopt an ecclesiological parallel to the "open but cautious" position used for spiritual gifts. They're not prepared to deny racial and spiritual unity, but they're leery about how to practice it. With one voice, all of these positions contend that living the new humanity achieved by Christ belongs to the "last things," and it's the last thing taught or cultivated.

But have we considered how much of the New Testament addresses this issue of racial solidarity in the concrete reality of the *local* church? Ephesians 2:11-22 exhorts unity across ethnic lines in the local church(es) at Ephesus. Wherever there are references to the universal church in the letter to Ephesus they are not used to justify delays in Christian unity in the local

church. Or, consider the establishment of the office of deacon in Acts 6. An entire New Testament church office is created to preserve cross-cultural/ethnic unity in the local church. And Paul rebukes Peter to his face for Peter's ethnically-inspired hypocrisy when it came to fellowshiping with Gentiles in the presence of Jews (Gal. 2).

In Ephesians 3, the Apostle Paul reminds his Jewish and Gentile Christian readers of the "mystery" he taught, a mystery "not known to the sons of men in other generations as it has now been revealed to his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit" (Eph. 3:5). The mystery of God now made known is "the Gentiles are fellow heirs [with Jews], members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel" (3:6). What has been brought to light for everyone is "the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God...that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places" (3:9-10).

In other words, the creation of this one new humanity—Jew and Gentile—displays the once-hidden plan and diverse wisdom of God. This display is "through the church." The establishment of peace and unity between Jew and Gentile in the church signals to the watching universe that God is wise. Israel's middle wall of separation, a wall God himself had erected as a display of his holiness, gives way to the church as the display of unity and peace accomplished by Jesus to the praise of the wisdom of God. But what will the watching universe conclude if all the Whites are meeting in one building, all the Blacks in another, all the Asians in another, and so on? Will it perceive this wisdom?

If our anthropology insists that "race" is a fiction and Christians are a new humanity, it may be that a mono-ethnic local church in a multi-ethnic neighborhood or city is biblically unwarranted. Our local church mandate will shift from striving for the easy unity of loving people who look like us to the seemingly more difficult task of loving "others." But this will only be more difficult if the "other" is actually an imagined other. If we recognize our fundamental unity in Adam, and our greater unity in Christ, questions of separation will be seen for what they are—a display of man's wisdom but not God's. And we'll prove again that God's ways are not our ways (Is. 55:8-9). On the other hand, if pursuing this reconciled reality becomes a "chore," then we've made it a "human work," failing to recognize that "burnout... is a theological problem—namely, a kind of Pelagianism." [21]

THE ULTIMATE CELEBRATION: THE NEW JERUSALEM

The Lord has declared the end from the beginning. Not one thing will ever threaten the success of his plans or the power of his will. And for our encouragement, he has given us a glimpse into the end for which we were made and remade in Christ. Revelation 5:9-10 and 7:9-10 record the scenes for us:

And they sang a new song, saying,
"Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals,
for you were slain, and *by your blood you ransomed
people for God*
from every tribe and language and people and nation,
and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our
God,
and they shall reign on the earth."

After this I looked, and behold, *a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages,* standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"

This is the glory that awaits the race of Christ. The redeemed from every people, tribe, language, and nation enjoy the glorious presence of the Lamb, worshipping him with one voice, singing of his wondrous salvation. The Father shed the blood of the Son to effect this eternal reality.

The redeemed will be in that place with glorified bodies (1 Cor. 15:44), "bearing the image of the man of heaven" (1 Cor. 15:49), "being like him, because we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). Our living on this day is preparation for our rejoicing on that day. As we eagerly reach forward to Christ beyond the veil of this life, we desperately need for this eternal view to bleed down into our temporal understanding and practice. That day is not an argument against genuine racial solidarity in the church this day. If anything, it is an encouragement for the pursuit of it now. Ironically, denying that "races" exist doesn't lead to the denial of all differences. It leads to the affirmative action of seeking the multitudes who as one man bow together to the risen Lamb.

CONCLUSION

Recently a woman from the Maryland area visited First Baptist Church of Grand Cayman. After the service, she excitedly told me how she had driven around the island looking for a place to worship. She was drawn to FBC because of the diversity she saw. "It's a little United Nations in here," she exclaimed.

I smiled at her encouragement and gave God thanks for the unity and peace he has worked in the body.

As I write this article, I see that our visitor was almost correct. The church is diverse, yes. But we are not a miniature United Nations (plural). By God's grace, we are *one* nation, *one* new and redeemed humanity in Christ. May it increasingly be so with all of Christ's church.

ENDNOTES

1. Mark A. Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).
2. See, for example, Elias C. Morris, "The Brotherhood of Man," in *Sermons, Addresses and Reminiscences and Important Correspondence* (Nashville, TN: National Baptist Publishing Board, 1901).
3. Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics: God and Creation, Volume Two* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004); Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology, Combined Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1996); James Montgomery Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith: A Comprehensive and Readable Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986); Robert Duncan Culver, *Systematic Theology: Biblical and Historical* (Great Britain: Mentor, 2005); Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994); Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986); and, William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology, Third Edition* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2003)
4. Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 194, 405, 450, and 459.
5. Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*, pp. 675-6, 693.
6. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, p. 409.
7. Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1986), p. 4. He writes: "It is therefore important for us to have the right understanding of man. As we try to arrive at a proper Christian understanding, we should keep in mind such questions as these: Are there still remnants of non-Christian anthropology in our thinking about man? How does our view of the human person help us better to understand God? What light does our anthropology shed on the work of Christ? What light does our view of man shed on soteriology? What light does our view of human nature shed on the doctrine of the church and the doctrine of the last things? What relevance does a Christian anthropology have for our daily life? How does the Christian view of man help us better face the pressing problems of today's world?"
8. See, for example, Richard Lints, Michael S. Horton, and Mark R. Talbot, *Personal Identity in Theological Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006); and, Ian A. McFarland, *Difference and Identity: A Theological Anthropology* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2001).
9. Douglas R. Sharp, *No Partiality: The Idolatry of Race and the New Humanity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002). Emphasis in the original.
10. See, for example, Orlando Crespo, *Being Latino in Christ: Finding Wholeness in Your Ethnic Identity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003); Michael O. Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Dennis L. Okholm (ed.), *The Gospel in Black and White: Theological Resources for Racial Reconciliation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997); Dave Unander, *Shattering the Myth of Race: Genetic Realities and Biblical Truths* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2000); Dwight N. Hopkins, *Being Human: Race, Culture, and Religion* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2005), Hopkins writes from the vantage point of black liberation theology, but provides some helpful insights; and Marjorie Bowers-Wheatley and Nancy Palmer Jones (eds.), *Soul Work: Anti-Racist Theologies in Dialogue* (Boston, MA: Skinner House, 2003).
11. See, for example, Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 204.
12. Culver, *Systematic Theology*, p. 250.
13. Berkhof, p. 188.
14. Culver includes a four-page discussion of organic unity and "races within the unity of race" where he correctly denies the existence of races of people. However, this discussion comes from a 1968 public forum and suffers from limitations and assumptions one might associate with that time. See Culver, pp. 244-247.
15. Hodge, *Systematic Theology, Vol. 2*, pp. 80-81. Hodge writes, "The Caucasian and the negro have existed with their present distinguishing characteristics for several thousands of years. But this does not prove that they differed from the beginning." And, "The great question is, are Mongolians, Africans, and Caucasians all derived from a common parent?" Thankfully and biblically, Hodge goes on to answer yes to this question.
16. Noll, *The Civil War as a Theological Crisis*, p. 73. As Noll puts it: "So seriously fixed in the minds of white Americans, including most abolitionists, was the certainty of black racial inferiority that it overwhelmed biblical testimony about race, even though most Protestant Americans claimed that Scripture was in fact their supreme authority adjudicating such matters."
17. Douglas R. Sharp, *No Partiality: The Idolatry of Race and the New Humanity* (IVP, 2002).

18. J. Daniel Hays, *From Every People and Nation: A Biblical Theology of Race* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003). Interested readers might also refer to Anthony Carter's [review](#) of *From Every People and Nation* in this issue of 9News.
19. Dave Unander, *Shattering the Myth of Race*, p. 100.
20. Okholm, *The Gospel in Black and White*, p. 10.
21. *Ibid*, p. 8.

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