

“Colorblind Racism, Colorblind Theology  
And Church Practices”

*“Theological reflection and construction that takes racism seriously must engage the task of exposing racist theological constructions that have infected our Christian heritage, deconstructing interpretations that masquerade as racially neutral, and constructing alternative theologies that promote the well-being of all races.”<sup>1</sup>*

**Two Vignettes**

**“The Friends”**

Ryan reminisces often about his college years. Why not? He made a lot of good friends, received a good education at a school located in a great setting. It was sometime during his senior year that he recalls having a conversation with a group of his close friends. Something had bothered him ever since he first attended that predominantly White Christian school, but he never managed to bring it up until now.

“When you see me, do you see Korean or American?” Ryan asked.

“What do you mean?” Ben responded.

“I mean, when you see me do you see a Korean person...or do you see an American person?”

Rachel chimed in with a definitive answer, “When we see you, we don’t see a Korean person OR an American person. We just see Ryan, YOU as an individual person.”

**“The Driver”**

“Why don’t you learn how to drive? GO BACK TO CHINA YOU FUCKIN’ CHINK!!”

Eric, only twelve years old, had heard this line for the umpteenth time from just another angry White driver. As they pulled into the gas station after that encounter, Eric’s wind slowly came back to him. *Sorry punk! He’s just a wimp. Shouts it out and then drives off! He can’t even come here and say it to our faces!*

“Mom, you okay?” Eric felt like asking his mom as he watched her putting gas in the car, but like many times in the past, he didn’t. He was too angry, too jolted.

“Why didn’t you make that turn faster?” Eric piped in a few minutes after they left the station. (Silence)

“WHY DIDN’T YOU MAKE THAT TURN FASTER?!” this time more forcefully.

“Why? What’s wrong with that turn?” his mom said, finally speaking up in her broken dialect, the one that Eric was shamefully aware of, especially around his “American” friends.

“If you would have gone faster, he wouldn’t have yelled at us!”

**The Issue and Why I Write**

To a portion of the public, it might appear as though the Civil Rights movement has defeated racism in all of its outward forms (e.g., laws such as the “Three-fifths Vote,” Jim Crow laws segregating people of color from Whites in schools, bathrooms, public transportation, and marriage). Recently however, the United States has been painfully and recently reminded with the likes of Michael Richards and Don Imus that this is clearly not the case. Richards, better known for his character, Kramer, on the sitcom “Seinfeld,” horrifically lashed out at two Black

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<sup>1</sup> Eleazar S. Fernandez, *Reimagining the Human: Theological Anthropology in Response to Systemic Evil* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2004), 142.

males at a Los Angeles comedy nightclub in November of 2006 with vulgar and racist profanities. In April of 2007, Imus, on his MSNBC-aired talk show spoke about the Rutgers women's basketball team (eight of the ten players on their roster are Black) as a bunch of "nappy-headed hos." 2006? 2007? If anything, we are reminded that the United States is not far from the pre-1960s when speaking of racism.

I include the vignettes above in order to bring the reader into my world of racism. Though this paper is more about the covert racism in the first vignette than it is about the overt racism in the second, sharing the latter is crucial to understanding the former more completely. The veiled form doesn't appear as unabashed and shocking as the second, and yet others<sup>2</sup> and I argue that the former is just as lethal and disempowering because it is so embedded within the fabric of our daily lives and discourse and therefore, difficult to name and address.

If racism is the name given to the actions of the persons in the second vignette, *colorblind racism* (defined below) is the appropriate term of the friends in the first. Some may find it difficult to associate the actions of the friends with any discourse of racism; it does appear harmless. However one of my purposes in writing is to reveal how this type of thinking is indeed racist (by not seeing my ethnicity, my friends could not truly see my experience as a male person of color in a White-dominated context). The force of the friends' words carries as much blow to my being as does the vocal expletive in the other story.<sup>3</sup> Another purpose in writing is to take colorblind racism a step further and to examine it within the parameters of theology and the practices of the church (particularly the Evangelical church/theology). My thesis is that there are strains of colorblind racism in the interpretations and practices of Evangelical theology and churches and therefore I offer suggestions in constructing a theology that reflects upon our practices and transforms them.

Simply stated, I am a second-generation Korean American Evangelical whose concern is that Evangelicals do not embrace ethnic and cultural diversity as readily as I think we should and therefore are prone to colorblind racism.<sup>4</sup> Though Evangelicals in the United States are accepting of different ethnicities and may even name diversity as a point of emphasis in their philosophies and institutions (e.g., "We are a diverse university"), I argue there are other priorities within Evangelical theology (e.g., *personal* salvation) that keep Evangelicals from viewing Christianity from a broader lens and thus, from mutually embracing color in their theology and practices. To frame and inform the issue, my methodology consists of using several areas of scholarly inquiry (sociology, religious education, and theology) in addition to narratives and personal anecdotes as a means for drawing one into theological reflection and critical analysis.

I divide the paper into several parts. First, I give several definitions that clarify any confusion surrounding terms and concepts I use throughout the paper. Second, pulling from

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<sup>2</sup> Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006); Benjamin Valentin, *Mapping Public Theology: Beyond Culture, Identity, and Difference* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2002), 102; Tony Campolo and Michael Battle, *The Church Enslaved: A Spirituality of Racial Reconciliation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 3-10.

<sup>3</sup> I decided not to censure the profanity for two reasons. First, I wanted the reader to feel the initial jolt I have felt many times having been the target of this kind of hatred. Second, by equating the effects of the first story to the second, I hope to communicate how serious a matter colorblind racism truly is.

<sup>4</sup> This appears the case especially of White Evangelicals and perhaps to a lesser extent, Asian American Evangelicals. Though there are exceptions, Black and Hispanic Evangelicals, perhaps because of their commitment to issues of social justice and Evangelical theology, exemplify Evangelicals who continue to embrace color and ethnicity. See Campolo and Battle, pp.58-75.

various disciplines, I provide tools to analyze this issue. Third, I introduce various theological ideas and practices I have come across in Evangelical theology and churches, and reflect on how these exhibit colorblind racism. Finally, I offer several assertions premised upon: (1) the image of God and (2) a God who sees and loves color in order to show why colorblind racism has no place in Evangelical theology and churches.<sup>5</sup>

### **Working Definitions**

*Race*—Most sociologists agree that race is a socially constructed term. That is, though there are biological differences in people of various groups and cultures, these differences have come to play a determining and differentiating role within society (and between societies). Rather than see all of humanity as one “race,” the human race, various people-groups are distinguished as having different races (e.g., “Asian race,” “African race”). This is problematic when race is used to classify persons within a society’s social strata since race “produces real effects on the actors [categorized] as ‘black’ or ‘white’ or *any other color*” (italics mine).<sup>6</sup> To notice biological difference is not the problem of “race.” It is what people do with those differences and the learned beliefs about a certain “race” that makes racializing people a danger.

*Racism*—Racism is the “attitude, action, or institutional structure or any social policy that subordinates persons or groups because of their color.”<sup>7</sup> It is domination of a less powerful group by a dominant and more powerful group, which stems from the belief that the dominant group is superior to the lesser on account of human traits and characteristics (e.g., skin color). Racism results in various forms of violence including but not limited to derogatory remarks, physical and emotional abuse, and laws and actions aimed to perpetuate racial inequality.

*New Racism*—Rather than being eradicated as a result of the Civil Rights movement, racism in the United States has taken on a covert form. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva describes several different tactics this new form of racism has used. For instance, residential segregation occurs through “not showing all the available units, steering minorities and Whites into certain neighborhoods, quoting higher rents or prices to minority applicants, or not advertising units at all.”<sup>8</sup>

*Colorblind Racism*—This is one manifestation of New Racism. It builds its lethality on not seeing color in people, but only seeing individuals, essentially removing them from their experiences *as a person of color* in a racialized society. Therefore, though persons in the United States can speak as if there is no apparent racism (“We’re a desegregated society,” “Everyone has an equal opportunity in this country,” “Just get over it (slavery), it’s a thing of the past,”) this type of racism becomes more perilous because it is so inherently embedded in our daily lives and discourse and comes from persons as close as our friends. For instance, whereas blatant racism relies “on name calling (niggers, Spics, Chinks), colorblind racism otherizes softly (‘these people are human, too’).”<sup>9</sup>

*Evangelical Theology*—There are common aspects to Evangelical theology in spite of its varied regional and historical forms. Some of these include: (1) an emphasis on Scriptural authority over against reason and tradition, (2) a priority on the experience of becoming a

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<sup>5</sup> Though I focus my audience to Evangelicals, I am well aware that this is not simply an Evangelical issue (again, I choose this audience because of my own theological roots and church experiences).

<sup>6</sup> Bonilla-Silva, 9.

<sup>7</sup> Derald Wing Sue, *Overcoming Our Racism: The Journey to Liberation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 31.

<sup>8</sup> Bonilla-Silva, 3.

<sup>9</sup> Bonilla-Silva, 3.

Christian and knowing Jesus as one's personal savior, (3) a belief in penal substitution atonement theory (Jesus died as a substitute for humanity's sin in order to appease a God without sin) (4) a stress on conversion, evangelism, and missionary work towards the goal of individuals accepting Jesus, and (5) an emphasis on holy living.<sup>10</sup>

## **Sociology and Religious Education**

### *Sociology*

Drawing from extensive interviews of Whites and Blacks in the Detroit area as well as the 1997 Survey of Social Attitudes of College Students from three universities in the western, midwestern, and southern regions of the United States, sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva offers four interpretive frames that reveal colorblind racism, two of which (*abstract liberalism* and *minimization of racism*) I highlight.<sup>11</sup>

Abstract liberalism bases its logic upon notions of equal opportunity for all, individualism, and meritocracy.<sup>12</sup> As individuals in the United States have choice, people are free for example, to live in segregated neighborhoods and send their kids to segregated schools if they so desire. Likewise, people are free to become economically stable if they so choose. I highlight here the emphasis upon individualism and choice, for the argument when used, poorly considers if at all, systemic issues that either prevents a person from choosing, or gives them bad options from which to choose.

Minimization of racism proposes that racial discrimination no longer affects the opportunities of persons of color. One line of thinking White students offered in the 1997 survey revealed their belief that "Blacks make situations racial that are not."<sup>13</sup> One student when asked whether or not racism affects minorities' life chances, answered by saying that it "depends on the individual," again revealing an emphasis upon individualism.<sup>14</sup>

Although Bonilla-Silva's study on colorblind racism is limited to non-religious data, Michael Emerson and Christian Smith's study on Evangelicalism and racism in the United States dovetails with his work rather well. Through their study, Emerson and Smith argue that many White Evangelicals see the race problem in the United States in one of three ways. First, many White Evangelicals conceptualize racism as the problem of "prejudiced individuals, resulting in bad relationships and sin."<sup>15</sup> Second, White Evangelicals assert that groups (usually Blacks) try to make the race problem a group issue when it is nothing more than an individual problem or no problem at all. In one interview, a White Evangelical dismisses Blacks who raise the issue of race as anything more than a "personal conflict" that does "not have anything to do with race."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Harriet A. Harris, "Evangelical Theology" in *The Dictionary of Historical Theology*, ed. Trevor A. Hart (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 197-200.

<sup>11</sup> Bonilla-Silva, 26. The other two are *naturalization* and *cultural racism*. "Naturalization is a frame that allows Whites to explain away racial phenomena by suggesting they are natural occurrences. For example Whites can claim 'segregation' is natural because people from all backgrounds 'gravitate toward likeness.'" "Cultural racism is a frame that relies on culturally based arguments such as 'Mexicans do not put much emphasis on education' or 'Blacks have too many babies' to explain the standing of minorities in society." See pp. 28-47 for more on each frame. Though these issues are pertinent to colorblind racism, I withhold these two because they do not come together with Smith and Emerson's "White Evangelical toolkit" (see below) as apparently as the two I do include.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Michael Emerson and Christian Smith, *Divided By Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 74.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 81.

Third, White Evangelicals see racism as a fabrication, and nothing more, of self-interested groups (again Blacks, but also the media, government, or liberals).

A key to understanding how many White Evangelicals come to these conclusions lies in what the authors call the “White Evangelical tool kit.”<sup>17</sup> The kit, which consists of “accountable freewill individualism, relationalism (attaching central importance to interpersonal relationships), and antistructuralism (inability to perceive or unwillingness to accept social structural influences),” shapes the way White Evangelicals view the world and the race problem. Because of a theological emphasis upon human beings as having freewill and being subjective actors, individualism and choice become major concepts and terms in an Evangelical’s understanding. Relationalism emphasizes the value of interpersonal relationships (between oneself and God, and oneself and others). It restores fallen human nature through a personal relationship with Christ. As a result of this emphasis, White Evangelicals often see social problems as rooted in poor relationships, the result of individual sin. Missing is a structuralist view where poor relationships might be the result of social structures (laws, the way an institution operates, etc.).<sup>18</sup>

### *Religious Education*

Maria Harris uses Elliot Eisner’s insights on every educational institution’s three curricula to reflect specifically upon education in the church. The three curricula include the explicit, implicit, and null.<sup>19</sup> Briefly, the explicit curriculum “refers to what is actually presented, consciously and with intention.” This includes for instance, the mission and purpose statements, printed literature, and spoken messages. The emphasis of this curriculum is upon what is consciously intended for the receiving audience. The implicit curriculum “refers to the patterns or organization or procedures that frame the explicit curriculum: things like attitudes or time spent, or even the design of a room.” An example of the difference between explicit and implicit curriculum might consist of a church whose leaders explicitly say they are a welcoming church. However, the visitor who receives no approaches for a handshake after service may “hear” a message altogether different. The implicit curriculum reveals a church perhaps, unwelcoming. Finally, null curriculum refers to the teaching that happens as a result of what is left out. For instance, it may not be in a church’s understanding to discuss issues of racism or poverty in the pulpit or in a Bible study class. By withholding certain subject matter, the church teaches what it is and is not. I am concerned that Evangelical curriculum, which focuses largely upon individual conversion and nurturing of an identity in Christ,<sup>20</sup> is currently limited in its ability to address issues of racism and ethnic diversity.

### **Reflection on Practices of Evangelical Churches and Theology**

In a recent sermon I heard from an Evangelical pastor, he said that God’s purposes are “counter-cultural.”<sup>21</sup> The pastor went on to say that God wants “his people to do something that oftentimes is against culture.” Since culture often appears to be used as a synonym for “race” in popular vernacular, statements like these concern me. A person might take from this statement the belief that culture is wrong (the implicit message). A prominent Evangelical only helps to

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>18</sup> For more, see pp. 76-80.

<sup>19</sup> The following discussion and quotes on the three curricula are found on pages 68-70. Maria Harris, *Fashion Me a People: Curriculum in the Church* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1989).

<sup>20</sup> Stanley J. Grenz, *Revisioning Evangelical Theology: A Fresh Agenda for the 21st Century* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 50.

<sup>21</sup> Personal participation, April 1, 2007.

advocate this message as he states that the core of Evangelicalism “transcends racial and ethnic differences” and that it “overcomes diverse sociological and social backgrounds.”<sup>22</sup> I might agree with this if he commented that the core transcends or overcomes *racism* rather than racial and ethnic differences. To “transcend” something is to be above it, to go beyond. The danger of transcendence however, is that it allows people not to see the details, color being one of them. Though his purpose in making this statement is to provide an understanding of Christianity that harmonizes people in unity, I argue that it only worsens the matter and ultimately strips the fullness of God and God’s diverse kingdom. If we Evangelicals only talk about transcending ethnicities and racial differences for the sake of an Evangelical spirituality,<sup>23</sup> we won’t reach a spirituality that is vital and alive for persons of color. At the least, we *do* need to see racial and ethnic differences, for those differences influence the way persons have experienced life in the United States as well as their spirituality. At the most, we need to mutually embrace other people’s experiences and understandings of God on the basis that God has created various ethnicities and cultures as good and something to be celebrated.

Two oft-quoted passages of Scripture I hear in many Evangelical settings are the passages from Galatians and Romans. In Galatians 3:28 Paul writes, “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”<sup>24</sup> Similarly, in Romans 10:12, Paul writes, “For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek.” The interpretations of these passages I often observe are that God doesn’t see color, God isn’t concerned about one’s ethnicity (“what matters is if you are his”), or that God’s culture rises above any of our cultures. I have asked many Korean American Christians if they see themselves as more a part of Korean culture or American (Western and United States) culture. The usual answer I receive closely resembles the following, “I am a child of God and part of God’s culture, not Korean or American.”<sup>25</sup> Elaine Howard Ecklund’s study of Korean Americans in two different church congregations (one a second-generation Korean American congregation and the other, a multiethnic congregation with Korean Americans) appears to validate this point. In her ethnographic observations and extensive interviews, she finds that many Korean Americans at the second-generation church reason that their Christianity is not tied to their ethnicity. Ecklund goes as far as to say that the church “focuses on ‘just the basics’ of Christianity and tries not to link Korean culture to faith.”<sup>26</sup> Rather, a “deeper and more sincere faith...one that separates Korean culture from Christianity” becomes the ethos of the congregation.<sup>27</sup> By contrast, the multiethnic congregation explicitly celebrates their ethnic diversities with the leaders encouraging members to view it as a “gift from God” and to “connect Christianity to valuing ethnic diversity.”<sup>28</sup>

The question that continues to arise is, when did ‘God’s culture’ not include particular ethnicity and race? When people’s theology speaks of God’s culture without understanding it as being made up of persons of color and other diversities, I propose that it becomes another way to

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<sup>22</sup> Grenz, 31.

<sup>23</sup> Grenz, 37-59.

<sup>24</sup> Scripture verses are taken from the New Revised Standard Version.

<sup>25</sup> The primacy of an identity simply as a child of God is reinforced in interviews with various Asian American pastors. See footnote 6 in Russell Jeung, *Faithful Generations: Race and New Asian American Churches*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 190.

<sup>26</sup> Elaine Howard Ecklund, *Korean American Evangelicals: New Models for Civic Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 36.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

de-colorize, de-emphasize and hence, make us insensitive to persons whose experiences and understandings have been vastly different from the “normative,” which is commonly the White, Eurocentric experience. Jacqueline Battalora reflects upon “Whiteness” and how it has become the standard of neutrality and normalcy in modern discourse. For instance, when a darker-skinned person goes to the store to buy “nude” color hose or band-aids, why is it that the color of those items appears lighter than their skin color?<sup>29</sup> I fear the implicit message in today’s Evangelical theology is to make “God’s culture” the norm without really analyzing the implications of that theology. It either “otherizes” persons of color (which contains seeds of racism), or it simply swallows us up in a white melting pot by neutralizing color and acting as if it does not exist. My concern stems from the reality that persons of color ultimately have no choice in whether or not race is an issue; it always is.<sup>30</sup> The rhetoric of God’s culture requires little of anyone to ask questions of what it means to live as persons of color in the United States and as a part of God’s kingdom *as* people of color. Additionally, my concern is that many Evangelical persons of color (e.g., Second-Generation Korean Americans) learn to celebrate less of their ethnic identity as they slowly become embedded in this language and understanding. Part of my concern is that Korean Americans are not taught to look at color through Evangelistic discourse. Though many Korean American Christians may not view race as a vital Christian issue, color is a daily experienced issue because of the racialized society that is the U.S.; it affects us whether we are cognizant of it or not. The other part concerns the effects of internalized racism. Without identifying and naming (colorblind) racism as such, it becomes difficult to address the concrete and destructive consequences of it.

As noted previously, another emphasis of Evangelical theology is to look primarily at individual concerns for salvation (his or her *personal* relationship with Jesus). This too becomes a theological concern for two reasons. First, it emphasizes the individual over the corporate/structural. “You matter to God”<sup>31</sup> is a much different theological statement than “You all as a whole matter to God,” or “You as a Yellow person matter to God.” By approaching theology with a systemic lens, persons are better positioned to not only see larger societal issues, but also to see how those issues have come to affect persons of color. To make a theological statement such as “Your Koreanness matters to God,” highlights the particularity of a person while avoiding an implicit message that God really might not see me (as in the statement “You matter to God”).

A second reason why I am concerned about Evangelical theology’s emphasis upon the individual and personal salvation is because this becomes the prevailing dialogue in Evangelical circles.<sup>32</sup> If one of the primary goals (if not *the* primary goal) for Evangelicals is to introduce persons to a saving relationship with Christ, we jeopardize possible discussions and engagement with issues outside of this boundary. The null curriculum of many White Evangelical churches on issues of racism, White privilege, and embracing culture, speaks loudly.

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<sup>29</sup> Jacqueline Battalora, “Whiteness: The Workings of an Ideology in American Society and Culture” in *Gender, Ethnicity, Religion: Views from the Other Side*, ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 8.

<sup>30</sup> Fernandez, 134-8.

<sup>31</sup> Bill Hybels, “Welcome,” <http://www.willowcreek.org/search.asp> (accessed April 24, 2007). This is a familiar motto of Bill Hybels, the pastor of Willow Creek, one of the largest Evangelical churches in the United States.

<sup>32</sup> Tony Campolo and Michael Battle argue that Evangelical’s emphasis upon personal salvation and individualism is the “root cause of the failure in the Evangelical community to deal with systemic racism.” See Campolo and Battle, 51.

## Theological Reflection

The heart of racism concerns the issue of human dignity and worth. It “involves our deepest beliefs about the human”<sup>33</sup> for the way we engage the Other reveals something deep within ourselves, perhaps genuine love or even deathly fear. I draw attention to the image of God, a biblical and theological anthropology that espouses humans to see themselves not only reflecting the semblance of God, but also bearing that image to humanity and all creation. Although the phrase, which comes from Genesis 1:26, holds many interpretations (e.g., spiritual endowments? supernatural qualities? morality?),<sup>34</sup> W. Sibley Towner reminds us that regardless the interpretation one chooses, a key significance of the expression is that it upholds a “very high view of human nature indeed!”<sup>35</sup> This anthropology gives dignity and inherent worth to every human being precisely because God has created us in God’s likeness. Additionally, Molly Marshall highlights that humanity only consists in its holistic form and cannot separate the physical body from the mind.<sup>36</sup> When I suggest an image of God anthropology, my point is not to emphasize that God has a physical body (though in Trinitarian belief Jesus did). However, I do stress that as humans are created *with bodies*, including physical traits such as skin color, we are to value and celebrate this because all have been created in God’s image and thus have worth. It would lessen the beauty and creativity of God when we simply celebrate people’s *human-ness* without mentioning color. That is, persons who celebrate me simply because I am *human*, do me (or God) no justice by ignoring that God has created me with darker skin tone. I believe God wouldn’t want my skin complexion any other way. I ask the Evangelical church to practice an image of God theology that intentionally celebrates ethnicity and color for it acknowledges God’s sovereignty and goodness in creating us just as we are.

Additionally, as persons of color learn to deny their ethnic heritage and identity in order to be seen as “American,” we must offer a theology of a God who not only sees color, but loves it.<sup>37</sup> Persons of color who act in ways that deny their true self not only harm themselves, but also those with whom they have potential fellowship, including family, friends, community and church. If Evangelical theology is based upon the foundational belief that God has come to save *in order to give life abundantly*, we must then offer a color-loving God, for many do not live abundantly on account of their color. “In a society in which people of color have suffered because of their racial identity, the way to their liberation requires an encounter with a God who affirms their race.”<sup>38</sup> When we speak of this kind of God, we express and communicate to both persons of color and to Whites that all persons are worthy and truly matter to God. People who claim the image of God *in their color* invite persons of color to share in the dignity and vocation of what it truly means to be human, that is, “the capacity to relate meaningfully to God and others.”<sup>39</sup> Marshall reminds us that as God created through spoken word, “conversations shape our identity” and our speech brings us into communion.<sup>40</sup> As persons of color enter into communities that see and embrace them as such, we now have spaces to speak and to shape our

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<sup>33</sup> Fernandez, 141.

<sup>34</sup> W. Sibley Towner, “Clones of God: Genesis 1:26-28 and the Image of God in the Hebrew Bible,” *Interpretation*, 59:4, 2005. See pages 343-4 for a fuller list.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 354.

<sup>36</sup> *What It Means to be Human: Made in the Image of God*, (Macon, GA: Smyth and Helwys Publishing, Inc., 1995), 29.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 147-9.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>39</sup> Marshall, 43.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.



identities as children of God. Our wounds and experiences of racism have holy ground upon which to walk and to be healed.

It is understandable why many Evangelicals (especially White) do not point out color. As I have addressed throughout this paper, many do not see it as a theological and practical issue, especially in light of Evangelical doctrinal foci. Others perhaps see it as an issue but do not address it for fear of a dismantling of their own privileged status. There are some who see it, but do not know how to address it. Finally, there are those who fear that raising the color issue and therefore pointing out difference might put them in a precarious predicament where they are accused of racism. With this last type, as a person of color, I boldly encourage the Evangelical church to rise up and indeed address the issue in their theologies, pulpits and curricula. My hope is for White Evangelicals to nurture (and to be nurtured by) *mutual* relations with persons of color to understand their experiences of God and life in the United States. Not only will White Evangelicals learn about others, they will learn how Whiteness has given them certain privileges and experiences unknown to others. Another practice is to preach antiracism and celebration of color from the pulpit. To deny any form of racism (“I am not a racist”) is different than committing oneself to antiracism. Whereas denial of racism that results in inaction is “tacit agreement that racism is acceptable,”<sup>41</sup> antiracism not only acknowledges that it exists but goes a step further by combating it. To preach effectively, one must be sensitive to the hermeneutical process, committing to keep the question of color, ethnicity and race in mind. A third practice is for Evangelical professors and academic institutions to incorporate the issue into their curriculum. Administrators and faculty can peruse course offerings and reading requirements to see if the issue is broached in classes. Where there is deficiency, it needs to be addressed. These are only a few of the many practices the Evangelical church can incorporate in order to deal with colorblind racism.<sup>42</sup> Evangelical theology and churches cannot afford to dismiss the issue if we are to fulfill the mandate to live faithfully and with holiness to God and others. To be silent is to perpetuate it.

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<sup>41</sup> Sue, 99.

<sup>42</sup> Sue’s book is invaluable in offering antiracist practices.

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