

# I

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION: MY STORY



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THIS BOOK EMERGES out of much pain, many wounds, sobered expectations, and yet hope for the future. After my spiritual awakening in college, I had great hopes of serving the church in Christ in the spreading of the gospel. As someone who was young and naive, and who continues to be in many ways (though not so young), I thought—with my own inflated view of my importance to the kingdom—I was going to be able to “make a difference” in helping to diversify Reformed and classical Presbyterian networks.

But I had a sobering wake-up call in 2004, when I received word that John Calvin-loving racists were beginning to post things about me on the Internet. It continues to this day, but the worst of it emerged in 2006. I learned that some of those for whom the Puritans are precious did not welcome my presence among them. On November 27, 2006, the following was posted on a blog about

me: “Afro-Knee Bradley, the PCA darling, is an illiterate nigger.” For several years, while teaching at a Presbyterian seminary in the Midwest, I repeatedly received racial slurs on the Internet and on radio programs from many who aligned themselves with historic Southern Presbyterianism and Calvinism. While I was aware that racism had been a part of Southern Presbyterian history and Calvinism in general, I had no idea that it remained alive and well and unchecked in some Reformed and Presbyterian churches. I was even more surprised to discover that few people were even talking about it.<sup>1</sup> I began to ask new questions about the presence of racism in evangelicalism at large, especially among those who openly boast about the soundness of their theology. This book represents my ongoing struggle to make sense of why evangelicalism struggles with diversity in church leadership and in the Christian academy. To lead this discussion, I have gathered Hispanic, black, and Asian scholars to describe their own experience as minorities and leaders in evangelical circles and to suggest ways to make real progress toward racial diversity.

The diversity in the book will be a challenge to some. I am fully aware that evangelicalism is now tribal, and many of us value the perspective of leaders from only our particular tribe—i.e., denomination, theological community, writers from a particular publisher, graduates of certain seminaries, and the like. The contributors to this book represent multiple tribes in terms of race and also in terms of church background, ranging from Baptist to Mennonite to Presbyterian. The representation of many tribes is a unique feature of this book on Protestant evangelicalism. The challenge for readers will be to read the stories and understand the hopes from those outside their respective tribes. I would argue that this is the beauty of the kingdom: that we have the opportunity to learn from other believers for whom Christ died and who might not share our denominational space or network affiliation. This book represents a great opportunity

to learn, especially for those of us who have spent many years in Reformed and Presbyterian associations.

I believe this conversation to be important because, to my surprise, I have encountered resistance even to the idea that the Reformed tradition has ever had any racism in any of its church leaders. It is important to know Christian history, so that we can learn from the past, and so that we don't repeat the same mistakes. We need to know our blind spots and weaknesses. We need to know how those who went before us needed the gospel, so that we might lean on the grace of God and be faithful to what he intends his people to do in our time as well. The Puritans are not precious to all of us. Honesty, confession, and repentance are the way forward. We need to be proactive.

Back when I had an active personal blog,<sup>2</sup> I questioned the silence about racism in broadly Reformed and conservative Presbyterian circles, then in response to my being called a "token negro" (again) on a popular racist website. I received this in an email from a well-known pastor in Reformed circles:

In the few sentences you wrote you are making Reformed Christians complicit in your charge of racism, and that's a serious thing. If you want to say that Reformed people are racist, you'll need to do better than pointing to one site whose whole *modus operandi* is racism. . . .

I've been Reformed just about all my life [and] I've never seen any hint of racism. Quite the opposite, in fact. I've found this movement systematically combating racism and seeking to be as integrated, as cross-racial and cross-cultural as possible. I could provide a heap of evidence to prove that. I can look to my own church and see a lot of races present and enjoying sweet fellowship together.

What was so surprising to me in the email was the simultaneous confidence in, and ignorance of, his own tradition, given that

he has been Reformed nearly his entire life. How can someone be so steeped in the Reformed tradition and never be introduced to how the Reformed tradition's racism gave birth to apartheid in South Africa, how it litters the anthropology of Abraham Kuyper, and how it is explicitly described in the work of R. L. Dabney?<sup>3</sup> It is the cultural and historical ignorance represented by statements like the one above that demonstrates the need for an honest, historically informed conversation. Many white evangelicals are resistant to the fact that racism remains in contexts driven by "the gospel." However, because sin still exists, there is no reason to believe that racism will simply magically disappear or that we simply need to "get over it" and "move on." In evangelicalism, there is a strange tendency to confess that we struggle with other sins, like materialism, anger, gossip, adultery, individualism, and the like, and to rebuke American society because of abortion, homosexuality, alcohol abuse, and so on, yet to ignore the racial issues in our own midst. This book is an attempt to humbly bring an issue that is important to minorities who are within and adjacent to evangelicalism to the attention of those committed to pressing the claims of Christ everywhere in life. This volume is a collection of stories and recommendations from Asian, black, and Hispanic leaders from multiple denominations, who write to help evangelicalism be a more faithful witness to the world in showing that the gospel brings people together in Christ from all tribes, languages, and cultures for a common purpose: to glorify God and enjoy him forever.

Evangelicalism will not make progress unless we listen to the stories and recommendations of ethnic leaders. The Reformed and Presbyterian tradition provides a good example of why this book is needed. Presbyterian denominations in America that subscribe to the Westminster Confession of Faith continue to struggle to diversify because of its cultural captivity, as some might suggest. What is worse, some Reformed and Presbyterian churches not only are culturally captive to white Western norms, but also have

embraced the doctrine of the spirituality of the church, which has provided an excuse for not speaking to issues like racial segregation after World War II. Joel Alvis highlights this history in *Religion and Race: Southern Presbyterians, 1946–1983*, as does Peter Slade in *Open Friendship in a Closed Society: Mission, Mississippi, and a Theology of Friendship*.<sup>4</sup> I inadvertently created a denominational firestorm by summarizing Slade’s findings on my blog. I was struggling to figure out why someone outside my own denomination knew parts of its history that I had never heard. Slade reports the following:

- Some Presbyterians in Jackson, Mississippi, seem to have played a role in resisting desegregation in Mississippi by embracing the “spirituality of the church” doctrine.<sup>5</sup>
- Rev. James Henry Thornwell issued a call to “reform” slavery, not abolish it.<sup>6</sup>
- On December 4, 1861, the representatives of forty-seven Southern presbyteries formed an Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States of America (PCCSA).<sup>7</sup>
- Mississippi Presbyterians exhibited paternalism toward blacks in the formation of institutions and programs designed to help them.<sup>8</sup>
- First Presbyterian Church in Jackson issued a statement in 1954 rejecting the Presbyterian Church in the United States’ support of the conclusion of *Brown v. Board*.<sup>9</sup>
- Dr. Guy T. Gillespie (a former president at Belhaven College) argued in favor of segregation.<sup>10</sup>
- Desegregation led to the launching of Christian schools in Jackson; Mississippi Presbyterians equated supporting desegregation with being a liberal in the 1960s.<sup>11</sup>

The above list does not represent the full story. The story of Presbyterianism in Jackson, Mississippi, should continue to be clarified, and there is good evidence that the future looks bright for discussing race in those circles in the future. Like the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod in 1994 and the Southern Baptist Convention in 1995, the Presbyterian Church in America passed an overture in 2002 strongly opposing racism and confessing general racism in the past, in an effort to move toward the gospel call to racial reconciliation.<sup>12</sup> The Missouri Synod successfully produced denominational leaders like Dr. John Nunes, the president of Lutheran World Relief. In 2012, the Southern Baptist Convention elected the Rev. Fred Luther as its first black denominational president. Some denominations are making real progress in terms of their leadership in taking action in accordance with their repentance.

The most courageous and unprecedented confession of racism to date in a conservative Presbyterian congregation occurred under the leadership of the Rev. Richie Sessions, senior pastor of Independent Presbyterian Church in Memphis, Tennessee.<sup>13</sup> Independent Presbyterian was founded in early 1965 after the session of Second Presbyterian Church in Memphis reluctantly admitted black worshippers, after it voted to limit the power of elders who were racial hard-liners. These men and their families responded by departing to found Independent Presbyterian, adopting a segregation policy based on the conviction that “the scriptures teach that the separation of nations, peoples and groups will preserve the peace, purity and unity of the Church.”<sup>14</sup> After years of leading his church in honesty, confession, and repentance, on Sunday, May 13, 2012, Ruling Elder Sam Graham read this statement:

On behalf of the Session, this public address to you today specifically marks the beginning of a time of corporate confession and repentance by Independent Presbyterian Church (past and

present) regarding the sin of racism. Just as we celebrate those aspects of our history at Independent Presbyterian Church of which we the Church are proud, we must also acknowledge with sadness and renounce and repudiate those practices in our history that do not reflect biblical standards. We profess, acknowledge and confess before God, before one another, and before the watching world, that tolerance of forced or institutional segregation based on race, and declarations of the inferiority of certain races, such as once were practiced and supported by our church and many other voices in the Presbyterian tradition, were wrong and cannot and will not be accepted within our church today or ever again. The Lord calls us to repent of the sin of prejudice; to turn from it and to treat all persons with justice, mercy, and love.<sup>15</sup>

This statement is an encouraging sign of real progress, especially if we see more Presbyterian church leaders and congregations throughout the southeastern United States make such courageous gospel confessions. These are great first steps for a church that still needs to deal with its own history for the sake of the gospel and for the sake of its own survival in an America that is increasingly becoming nonwhite.

### **The Event That Launched This Book**

On Tuesday, November 3, 2009, Regent University announced Dr. Carlos Campo as its eighth president, filling the seat vacated by its founder, Dr. Pat Robertson, following news that Robertson would be stepping down from his duties at the school to become chancellor.<sup>16</sup> Universities acquiring new presidents are no big deal. It happens every year all over the country. What made the Regent announcement particularly significant was that a Latino leader was becoming the president of a major evangelical institution—perhaps the first Latino to assume such a role in US history. I was in shock, and I went on a search to find others. After searching for

quite some time, I discovered that, while some evangelical colleges and seminaries may have blacks, Latinos, and Asian-Americans on the faculty or even in a few senior administrative positions, you will not find many black or Latino presidents among the evangelical schools accredited by the Association of Theological Schools and the evangelical member schools of the Council for Christian Colleges & Universities. In fact, the only other minority president of an accredited evangelical school in North America is the newly appointed Dr. Pete Menjares of Fresno Pacific University.<sup>17</sup> I wonder why it is that evangelical colleges and seminaries tend to be led by white males. What does this mean for a global Christianity where the center of growth is found neither in Europe nor in the United States, but in Africa, Asia, and Latin America? I wonder what impact this has on how Christian colleges and seminaries will raise up leaders for the church in the future. In fact, if evangelical institutions are going to have ethnic leaders, all levels of Christian life will need more diversity, from the local church to the seminary classroom.

Moving forward, evangelicals will need to learn how to partner and build relationships with predominately minority denominations that share the same commitments to the gospel and the authority of Scripture, but have not been traditionally considered “evangelical.” For example, most evangelicals have never heard of the Church of God in Christ, which is the largest and most conservative black denomination in America, having nearly 5.5 million members.<sup>18</sup> I am wondering how resources and perspectives can be shared to bring greater unity to the body of Christ for the sake of the gospel (John 17). Many attempts have been made in the past few decades without much traction.

### **Diversify or Else?**

In *The Next Evangelicalism: Freeing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity*, Soong-Chan Rah rocked the evangelical

church by pointing out that, because of the realities of global Christianity, evangelicalism will become extinct in the United States if it does not begin to take race more seriously.<sup>19</sup> Rah uses the word *captivity* in the same way that Martin Luther used it to define cultural problems in Catholicism in his tract *On the Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (or in the way that R.C. Sproul wrote about the “Pelagian Captivity of the Church”). Using Rah’s analysis, one would likely conclude that evangelical churches may be destined for continued decline unless Asians, Latin Americans, and communities connected to Africa and the Caribbean are handed the leadership baton, so that they offer direction. Rah wonders if evangelicalism’s demise can be found in its cultural captivity to, and idolatrous worship of, white, Western cultural norms. For example, he points out that living in or near cities and not having multiethnic church leaders and members may be a recipe for extinction. In 1900, Europe and North America accounted for 82 percent of the world’s Christian population. In 2005, that number is down to 39 percent. Presently, 60 percent of the world’s Christians are in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Moreover, by 2023 half of America’s children will be nonwhite.<sup>20</sup> As these trends continue, America will likely have a white minority by 2050, observes Rah.<sup>21</sup>

Rah notes that, in the last fifty years, the evangelical church became enmeshed in secular values like individualism, consumerism, and materialism—and racism. According to Rah, evangelicals have turned Christianity into a “me-centered” faith, where one is concerned primarily with one’s personal relationship with Jesus and one’s own family, while ignoring the social dimensions of the gospel’s work in local communities. Evangelicals tend to embrace a materialistic and consumerist expression of faith: families church hop to find the best youth programs or pursue the idols of comfort, ease, and professional success in comfortable church buildings.

Moreover, from the 1950s through 2000, evangelicalism grew significantly on the heels of “white flight” away from “liberals” and minorities. Suburban Christian schools grew. Suburban churches grew. Some churches even moved entire congregations out of cities to the suburbs to get away from minorities. Evangelicalism is so unaware of its syncretism and cultural captivity that the mere suggestion of its possibility is controversial.

### *Is Rah Right?*

In 1994, I joined the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA). It remains a great denomination, committed to the historical, covenantal definition of *Reformed*, and I remain committed to it, flourishing with excitement for its future in global Christianity. Since its beginning, the PCA, like many evangelical denominations and associations, has appealed to white Christians who tend to be socially, politically, and theologically conservative within middle-class America, and the PCA is still highly successful at reaching that population. This is not a criticism, but simply an honest description of what it is. If denominations like the PCA do not diversify, what kind of future will they have?

Many wonder if the conservative evangelical captivity to white, Western culture will make it an outsider in a global Christian world that is primarily African, Asian, and Latin American. Using Soong-Chan Rah’s book and the PCA, I conjectured about this on my blog in a post titled “Freeing the PCA from white, Western (and Southern) Cultural Captivity: A Rahian Analysis,” which garnered lots of inadvertent attention.<sup>22</sup>

I simply wanted to set the stage for the application of Rah’s analysis by first acknowledging the fact that global Christianity is no longer centered in Europe or North America. The center of global Christianity is now in Africa, Asia, and Latin America.<sup>23</sup> From Rah’s perspective, evangelical churches remain primarily Eurocentric in their understanding of Christianity and how

the gospel applies to modern life. Second, as America becomes increasingly nonwhite, predominantly white denominations will continue to stagnate or decline. Many suburban-centered confessional denominations experienced significant growth as a consequence of the white-flight cultural movement of the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. But the homogenous unit principle that drove church planting during those decades can no longer produce the numbers that it used to.<sup>24</sup> Some call that era “planned apartheid.”<sup>25</sup> But the initial white-flight movement has ended, and the once-celebrated homogeneity that grew the denomination may lead to its demise.

According to recent data, by 2023 half of America’s children will be nonwhite. A church predominantly made up of white people is a church that will likely close its doors within the next generation. White-flight demographics cannot sustain confessional denominations in America’s future because the growing and vibrant churches in America are primarily Asian, Latino, and immigrant churches.<sup>26</sup> Because ethnic denominations and associations are not a part of evangelicalism, they are often overlooked and ignored, leaving the impression that regions of the country (especially cities) are spiritually dead—when they are not. Finally, predominantly white evangelical denominations and associations have established a cultural context in which the only acceptable blacks, Latinos, and Asians are those who tend to be what some might call “sell-outs,” “oreos,” “twinkies,” and the like—that is, those who are culturally white and tend to separate from their own ethnic communities. The more an ethnic person adopts white cultural norms, leaving his or her ethnic heritage behind and denigrating it, the more likely it is that that person will be embraced as a representative of “diversity” in evangelical circles.

Confusing racial tokenism with progress provides some denominations and associations with a false sense of progress.

To decorate agencies, committees, and staffs with racial minorities, as if they were ornaments on a Christmas tree, so as to give the *appearance* of progress, is unacceptable. These are *tokens*, people of color who are invited to strengthen existing systems and further the captivity of the dominant culture, says Rah.<sup>27</sup> There is a difference between being invited to sit on a committee as a token representative and being asked to lead the committee, staff, or agency, thus having whites submitting to the authority of people of color. Rah observes,

The rules of the table have already been set and there's not a whole lot of room but come sit at our table. We won't change the way we interact with one another and we will need to maintain the white majority, but it still would be nice to have an Asian face or a black face to sit at our table. If the places at the table are already set, and ethnic minorities are asked to put aside their comfort to join an already existing power dynamic and structure, then we are not engaging in genuine ethnic diversity. Ethnic minorities are being asked to play the role of token minority who should be seen but not heard, rather than those who have wisdom and experience to transfer to the . . . community.<sup>28</sup>

Having an Asian, Latino, or black person sitting in a room, sitting on a committee, is different from ethnic members leading and determining future direction. This type of leadership transition requires whites to submit to the authority of nonwhites. For confessional denominations like the Reformed and Presbyterian churches, nonwhite leadership would be a new experience. Rah suggests that a denomination's understanding of the gospel and the kingdom is substandard, deficient, and handicapped unless it is also crafted by the theological contributions of Asians, Africans, and Latin Americans. We need new norms.

Virgilio Elizondo maintains, "Whites set the norms and project the image of success, achievement, acceptability, nor-

malcy, and status.”<sup>29</sup> There must be an honest conversation about how white privilege renders evangelical institutions incapable of having Asians, Latinos, African and Caribbean immigrants, and blacks as heads of agencies or chairing committees and determining direction, locally and globally.<sup>30</sup> White privilege maintains a system that places white culture in American society at the center and all other cultures on the fringes.<sup>31</sup> Socially nurtured in contexts of abundance, cultural dominance, and social ease, whites are by definition incapable of effectively applying the gospel to people whose stories arise out of poverty, suffering, and marginalization, suggests Rah.<sup>32</sup> When one’s understanding of God emerges out of affluence and privilege, one’s ability to relate and communicate to people who are not from that context is hindered. The cultural privilege that white Christians have had in America is foreign to the experience of Christians in the New Testament and the early church. Africans, Asians, Latinos, blacks, and Slavs in Eastern Europe, on the other hand, have a cultural experience more like that of the Christians in the early church, some argue.

## **Moving Forward**

This book does not propose to provide all the solutions to the complex issue of race, but we do hope to show a way forward, to give those who care about diversity a framework for making needed changes. I was encouraged to say this in a discussion on race that was moderated by John Piper and Tim Keller in connection with Piper’s book *Bloodlines*.<sup>33</sup> This book discusses the future of gospel-centered evangelicalism and its ability to reach diverse communities and raise up ethnic leaders who reflect the realities of global Christianity. The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS) has the best Protestant document to date that outlines what went wrong and explains the challenges that we face in the American context. In February

1994, the Commission on Theology and Church Relations of the LCMS released a report entitled “Racism and the Church.” I included this document in the appendix because I believe it should serve as a representative starting point for all American Protestants for how to move forward. With clarity and honesty, the LCMS discusses why the Bible condemns racism, their own specific failings, theologically and ecclesiastically, the problem of white privilege, white flight, and paternalism, and the hard steps necessary for gospel-centered change in their denomination. I believe the Lutherans prophetically demonstrate good thinking and succeed at framing this discussion in ways that no evangelical has yet.

With the Lutheran document in hand, this book is intended to serve as a catalyst for a national conversation about moving forward. We do not have all the answers either, but the contributors to this volume intended to be fundamentally positive about the next steps. As shown by the previously mentioned email I received from a pastor, there are still some who believe that evangelicalism is immune to racism. So contributors begin their reflections with biographical accounts of their own encounters with racial tension within evangelicalism, but spend the bulk of their essays offering direction and hope for the future.

We begin with Rev. Lance Lewis, a pioneering African-American pastor in the Presbyterian Church in America, who reflects on the challenges of planting black churches in black communities, though the churches are in predominantly white denominations. Lewis describes ways in which church-planting initiatives can be more successful in reaching ethnic communities.

In chapter three, Dr. Amos Yong helps us understand some unique challenges among Asian-Americans in theological education. I searched for nearly two years to find Asian-American theologians who were willing and able to speak honestly. I asked

several, and Dr. Yong was the only one who was able to join us. The project is enhanced by his contribution.

In chapter four, Dr. Juan Martínez writes about developing Hispanic pastoral leadership. He focuses on the unique challenges of planting churches in Hispanic communities and developing Hispanic pastoral influence in predominantly white denominations. Dr. Martínez has been developing Hispanic leaders for decades, and his wisdom and experience are invaluable.

In chapter five, Dr. Vincent Bacote writes on the challenges of blacks and Latinos in publishing within evangelical theological associations, paying special attention to the Evangelical Theological Society. Dr. Bacote is a seasoned theologian with commitments to developing space for minorities to make contributions to evangelical discourse.

In chapter six, Dr. Harold Dean Trulear focuses on the challenges of recruiting and developing blacks and Latinos in academic, teaching, and leadership positions in predominantly white Christian colleges and seminaries. Some readers may be unfamiliar with Dr. Trulear and his work at Howard University. He has been a leader in the National Association of Black Evangelicals for several years and is a fellow at the Center for Public Justice. Dr. Trulear has volunteered and consulted for a number of organizations, such as InterVarsity Christian Fellowship and Biblical Theological Seminary.

Dr. Orlando Rivera writes in chapter seven on the challenges of recruiting, graduating, training, and placing blacks and Latinos in Christian colleges and seminaries. Professor Rivera has special expertise in the church, theological education, and organizational management.

In chapter eight, we get perspective from someone in a traditionally black denomination. Dr. Ralph C. Watkins offers a black church perspective on minorities in predominantly white institutions. This chapter focuses on ways in which predominantly white