

EXCERPT

IVP Academic

**Can "White" People Be Saved?**  
*Triangulating Race, Theology, and Mission*  
Missiological Engagement Series, Volume 12

November 6, 2018 | \$30, 240 pages, paperback | 978-0-8308-5104-1

## An Analysis of Racism and the Whiteness Enterprise

In constructing handles to engage race and racism, this volume builds on the previous scholarly work of many but fills a missiological lacuna. Here we describe the missiological implications regarding constructions of race and the influence of racism in a variety of interlocking domestic and international contexts, offering practical guidelines for developing new habits of mind and body toward the development of an intercultural missiology that is sensitive to matters of race. In this volume, the authors advance the current prevailing academic dialogue of race and whiteness beyond a mere focus on past ills of the seventeenth to twentieth centuries of European colonialism, toward a positive intercultural missiology. Though the essays do not hesitate to situate contemporary race relations in their proper historical context in terms of global and local social forces, the authors do not stop there or prioritize deconstructing, excusing, or simply explaining how the church, its orthodox theology, and its kingdom-building missiology contributed to the abuses, racism, and prejudices against women, Blacks, and non-European cultural values. Each essay presses forward by offering a positive vision toward building a new intercultural missiological imagination and practice. The interdisciplinary dialogue we offer in this collection incorporates an interweaving of theological, historical, womanist/feminist, postmodern, and cultural psychological as well as sociological analyses of racism and the whiteness enterprise.

Hence, in tackling the nexus of race, theology, and mission, the essays in this volume deftly deploy cutting-edge theory in racial and ethnic studies while putting this reflection to the service of scholarship in theology and missiology for the global church. For example, these days it is not uncommon to hear multiethnic criticisms of discourse about race and racism that fails to go beyond the "Black/White binary." Among other things, these critical theorists advocate for analyses of racism that explore how other communities of Color experience the effects of racialization, though some populist or post-racialist versions of this demand can be decried as a desire to ignore or avoid anti-Black bias, which thus operates to deepen it. We heartily agree with the sentiment that Christian analysis of race relations must explore the myriad of ways that racism deforms *all peoples* as image bearers, and we think it is important that conversations about racism examine the way that the phenomenon of whiteness establishes a racial logic that categorizes peoples from White to Black and functions to elide the pluriformity of social, cultural, and economic diversity *within* the phenomena of global African, Asian, Amerindian, and Latina/o diasporas.

Thus, the volume serves the church by introducing key concepts in ethnic and racial studies—among them racism in its various forms (e.g., institutional, cultural, internalized, passive, active), whiteness, white supremacy, and race—and analyzing how they relate to theological and missiological reflection. Over the years, theorists have debated the wisdom of defining *racism* in terms of the way it provides unequal access to social privilege or the levers of social power for those in the group at the top of the racial hierarchy. The authors in this volume who discuss the contours of racism all opt in favor of seeing *privilege* as the critical resource mediated in racist societies, defining racism as the ideology that operationalizes race in social institutions involving belief (whether conscious or unconsciously held) in the congenital superiority of one race over others, resulting in privilege for those atop the racial hierarchy and unequal treatment and exclusion from legal protections, exploitation, and violence for those lower on the hierarchy.

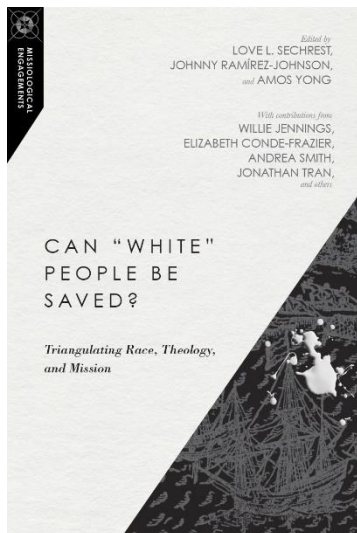


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The volume connects the discussion of racism in ancient times to contemporary forms of the phenomenon by describing the similarities between modern racism and ancient ideologies that similarly function to order peoples hierarchically (i.e., *proto-racism*). Both ancient racism and modern racism proceed via the mechanism of determinism; that is, they both involve ideologies that assign negative psychosocial characteristics to people via immutable qualities like ancestry or place of birth. On the other hand, the volume also extends a conversation about race into the future by examining the concept of *post-racialism*, various forms of which represent the goals and mechanisms to which and by which a society grappling with racism should move. As one of our contributors notes, intriguingly, these goals can actually function as a way of perpetuating the racializing effects of inequalities embedded in society. Indeed, some accounts of post-racialism are synonymous with *colorblindness* as a response to racism, a commonly held value among evangelicals that rejects attention to race in society as a way of eliminating racial discrimination. Yet, in calling for an end to racial categorizations without first recognizing and eradicating historical, persistent, and ongoing differentials between racial groups in terms of access to housing, employment, education, wealth, health care, political representation, and more is to render racial inequities permanent—in effect, it perpetuates “racism without racists.” As with some forms of post-racialism, colorblindness allows people to espouse egalitarian values while continuing to enjoy the benefits of unequally ordered social arrangements that advantage Whites and disadvantage people of Color.

The volume opens with an essay that examines the phenomenon of *whiteness*, which orders global systems of dominance that favor Whites and that have in turn nurtured racism, white supremacy, and patriarchy. Critically, several of these essays distinguish whiteness from white skin color and European ancestry, describing it as an idolatrous way of being in the world at its core and thus activating a question that any reader needs to confront about the degree to which one’s own praxis and worldview yearns for or participates in whiteness. For those curious about differentiating whiteness from the concept of white supremacy, one might say that white supremacy is a specific and historically particular form of racism, which in turn refers to a general set of practices and beliefs embedded in institutions that promote a hierarchical ordering of racial groups from best to worst. Hence, *white supremacy* can be defined as the ideology that centers whiteness, and we can note how it creates and sustains institutions and practices that promote the social, political, and economic dominance of Whites and the oppression of people of Color. Accordingly, several of our authors reflect on racism as an ideology that operates in conjunction with white supremacy.

Having differentiated the concept of *whiteness* from *white skin color* above, and having defined whiteness as an idolatrous mode of being in the world that participates in white supremacy—whether actively or passively, explicitly or implicitly—we think it is important to address questions raised by the title of this book, which is drawn in part from Jennings’s essay: *Can “White” People Be Saved?* Biblically, of course, this question can be answered only one way, the same way that Peter responded to a question about the healing miracle at the Beautiful Gate when questioned by the authorities: “By what power or by what name did you do this [healing]?” (Acts 4:7). Filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter gave an answer that speaks to the multivalent nature of “salvation” in the Bible:

“Let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in *good health* by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead. This Jesus is

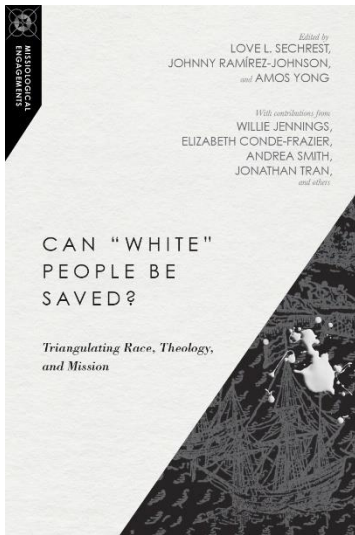


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'the stone that was rejected by you, the builders;  
it has become the cornerstone.'

There is *salvation* in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved."

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John and realized that they were uneducated and ordinary men, they were amazed and recognized them as companions of Jesus. (Acts 4:10-13, *emphases ours*)

Peter's answer identifies Jesus as the source of the physical healing, which provides good health, and also identifies Jesus the only source to fill the people's spiritual need to be saved. Yet it is not an accident that both material and spiritual needs are addressed under the unified category of "salvation." Only Jesus can give salvation—there is no other vehicle, avenue, source, or process by which one can obtain deliverance. And as was true for Peter, those working in Jesus' name today are the conduits of the blessings of salvation among human communities. Therefore, yes, of course, all people, including those who have white skin, can be saved by the name of Jesus—with respect to both a physical or material need for healing and a spiritual need to obtain mercy from God.

If this is so, why do we pose this provocative question in the first place? We do so in order to highlight the distinction between people with *white skin color* as those who can all be saved by Jesus like all other humans and the culture of *whiteness* predicated on the *material* value of white supremacy, a value that can also be promoted—whether explicitly or implicitly—by people of any color. The culture of whiteness, as explained by Willie Jennings in chapter one, refers to a sociopolitical enterprise that promotes European white supremacy along with the Western project of expansion, conquest, and colonization that subjugated Natives, enslaved Africans, and exploited Asians as well as Pacific Islanders. Whiteness is unmarked in the West as the histories, doctrines, and cultural identification of Whites are assumed as standard, while those of people of Color are noted and particular (i.e., Black theology vs. theology). In other words, though it is true that Western society makes it easy for Whites to remain blind to the pervasive nature of white supremacy, White people and the whiteness project are not necessarily one and the same.

The Acts passage does not parse or differentiate the power to heal a man lame from birth from the power to save from perdition (Acts 3:1–4:21), though today it is common to bifurcate a vertical component of salvation from God's judgment from a horizontal deliverance from physical privation. When the church preaches salvation of souls while matters of physical and social well-being are ceded to outside institutions such as government and dedicated charities, the result divides *salvation* into two separate spheres—physical and spiritual—that subvert the original multilayered concept exhibited in Peter's explanation to the socio-religious authorities in Acts 4. This bifurcated ideology creates, nourishes, and maintains the fertile soil for the whiteness project to prosper, and we maintain that this whiteness project (signified by our use of the phrase "*White" People* in the title) *cannot be saved!* We who have benefited from the whiteness project, whether by the color of our skin or by our unconscious biases in favor of white norms, white institutions, and white culture, are like that man lame from birth in need of walking again. Having benefitted economically, politically, and socially, we are lame because of the weight of the sins of the system that have accrued to us. We need the healing of Jesus to make us whole.

—From the introduction, "Race and Missiology in Glocal Perspective"

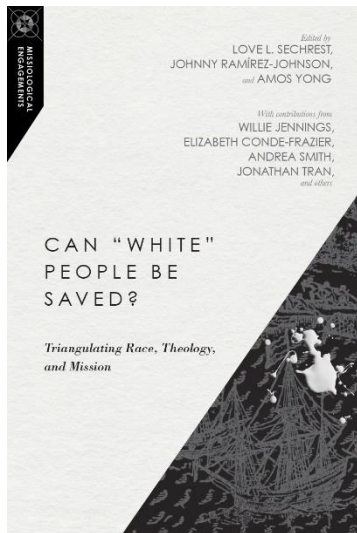


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## TALKING POINTS

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### ***Can "White" People Be Saved?*** ***Triangulating Race, Theology, and Mission*** Missiological Engagement Series

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Edited by Love L. Sechrest, Johnny Ramirez-Johnson, and Amos Yong

Contributions by Willie James Jennings, Andrea Smith, Hak Joon Lee, Akintunde E. Akinade, Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, Angel D. Santiago-Vendrell, Andrew T. Draper, Erin Dufault-Hunter, Clifton Clarke, Daniel Jeyaraj, and Jonathan Tran

## Changing the Culture of Whiteness

White normativity as a way of being in the world has been parasitically joined to Christianity, and this is the ground of many of our problems today. Written by a world-class roster of scholars, this volume develops language to describe the current realities of race and racism, challenging evangelical Christianity to think more critically and constructively about race, ethnicity, migration, and mission in relation to white supremacy.

- What is the significance of the provocative title *Can "White" People Be Saved?* What is the meaning behind the word *white* in this instance?
- What is the *whiteness project* or the *culture of whiteness*? What is the difference between white people and whiteness? What does it have to do with white supremacy?
- What are the roots of whiteness, and how does it play out in our current political climate? On the mission field? In our churches?
- What are the disciplines for building an anti-racist identity? What is *guesting* as it relates to building this kind of identity?
- How can biblical notions of race and ethnicity enable constructive contemporary responses to the international, intercultural, and interethnic realities of the twenty-first century?
- How might historical and contemporary perspectives from the African, African diaspora, and North American contexts prompt fresh theological and missiological questions about race and racism in relationship to white supremacy?
- How could Native, Hispanic, and Latino/a American experiences of colonialism, migration, and hybridity inspire evangelical theologies and practices of racial justice and shalom?
- How will Asian, Asian diaspora, and Asian American experiences of race, ethnicity, and class contribute to discussions in North America and generate transnational resources for responding to the challenge of systemic injustice?
- How might evangelical Christianity in particular and the North American church in general think more critically, theoretically, and constructively about race, ethnicity, and migration?
- How might such historical and theological perspectives affect the church's practice and witness regarding intercultural relations globally and its engagement of structural and systemic injustices?



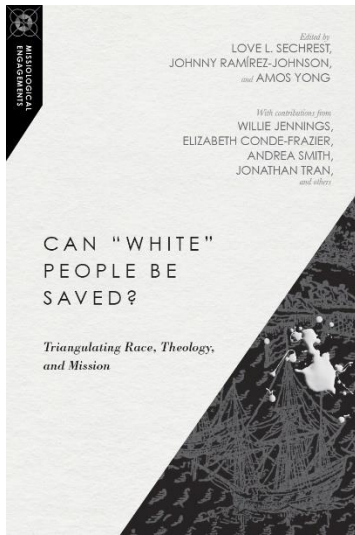
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## DETAILS

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Missiological Engagements reflects cutting-edge trends, research, and innovations in fields that are of relevance to theorists and practitioners in churches, academic domains, mission organizations, and nongovernmental organizations, among other arenas.

## Missiological Engagements Series

Books in the Missiological Engagement Series, both monographs and edited collections, feature contributions by leading thinkers representing evangelical, Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Orthodox traditions, who work within or across the range of biblical, historical, theological, and social scientific disciplines. Authors and editors include the full spectrum of younger and emerging researchers to established and renowned scholars from the Euro-American West and the majority world, whose missiological scholarship bridge church, academy and society.

Among its guiding questions are the following: What are the major opportunities and challenges for Christian mission in the twenty-first century? How does the missionary impulse of the gospel reframe theology and hermeneutics within a global and intercultural context? What kind of missiological thinking ought to be retrieved and reappropriated for a dynamic global Christianity? What innovations in the theology and practice of mission are needed for a renewed and revitalized Christian witness in a postmodern, postcolonial, postsecular, and post-Christian world?

- *Can "White" People Be Saved? Triangulating Race, Theology, and Mission* edited by Love L. Sechrest, Johnny Ramirez-Johnson, and Amos Yong
- *Intercultural Theology, Volume One: Intercultural Hermeneutics* by Henning Wrogemann, translated by Karl E. Böhmer
- *Explorations in Asian Christianity: History, Theology, and Mission* by Scott W. Sunquist
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