

Book Review  
Being White: Finding our Place in a Multiethnic World  
By Paula Harris and Doug Schaupp  
Reviewed by Glen Kinoshita

“Being White: Finding our Place in a Multiethnic World” is not only a much needed contribution to the dialogue on racial reconciliation but for many it is an answer to prayer. In the experiences of many who are engaging in racial reconciliation, the voices always seem to echo, “where are the white people in this process?” “What role does the white person in America have in justice, compassion, and for making peace?”

Paula Harris and Doug Schaupp have given the Body of Christ a gift in their recent work on being white in a multiethnic world. The authors begin by offering us a glimpse into their personal journeys as white people in America and the life experiences that have resulted. This book is an invitation to join them in a lifelong journey of learning and spiritual growth. It is not an academic or theoretical treatise. It is a down to earth attempt to first and foremost assist white people in making a difference in a multiethnic context. Secondly, it is for people of color to learn some of the internal struggles of white people who are seeking to grow in a diverse world as well as to move toward a godly interdependence with diverse communities.

There are many significant factors that this book covers. First, it is a Christian approach to the contemporary challenges of diversity and the role white people have in our society. For those who have sought resources to grow and learn from, it is no secret that there is a paucity of work from a Christian or Biblical perspective on these subjects. This book is replete with scripture references and puts the reader in a position to apply Biblical exhortations as they face some of the difficult challenges in this area.

Secondly, the authors use their own stories to validate the process they challenge us to embark. In other words, Doug Schaupp and Paula Harris are speaking from significant life experiences. Hence, when they speak of the pain or the joys of this journey they are speaking in the first person. Many will be able to find hope and comfort in the wisdom they offer. The authors do not hide the fact that it is a difficult process or that they have made mistakes. But they also offer a responsible picture of the fact that white people can make a difference in God’s multiethnic kingdom and even have a unique role to play.

Thirdly, many of the issues that white people face on an individual and personal level are addressed. The authors again draw from their own experience as well as their interactions with many other white people. Some of the topics covered in the book include: the issue of guilt over being white; the concept of color blindness; the fact that white people don’t feel they have a culture; feeling bad about being white and that there are no good aspects of their culture. Doug’s chapter on “Can God Redeem White Culture?” is of significance because he describes norms and values of white culture and how scripture affirms many of these aspects. Another significant contribution occurs when they address the need to continue the journey and not give up. Paula exhorts, “People get hurt easily in the multiethnic journey, and we white people are quick to give up. We call it ‘racial fatigue,’ but that is just a fancy label for unresolved pain. The cross

of Jesus is enough for all our pain. We just keep coming to Jesus and let him heal our wounds” (128).

Fourthly, the authors do not ignore the fact that white people in America do have privilege and that institutional racism is a responsibility that they must embrace. Paula writes, “Racism divides us. But what is it? Whites and people of color often don’t agree. Whites have to learn to see and confront racial sin. We have to learn the truth about white history” (97). The fact that this book addresses that whites and people of color do not speak the same language when it comes to racism makes it a crucial work in order for us to deal with the pivotal issues, which would make it possible for us to move forward. “For a system with racial privilege to operate once it is set up, all whites have to do is ignore it. To deconstruct it, first we have to work hard to see it. Then we have to join forces with the people of color around us to rebuild a new, more just and godly system” (103). These are hard issues for anyone to deal with but Doug Schaupp and Paula Harris, from their own experience and study of scripture, lead us in a sensitive and gracious way to confront truths that are necessary in order to bring healing and peace.

“Being White: Finding our Place in a Multiethnic World” does not pretend to offer simple, easy to follow solutions that will instantly mend our brokenness or solve the world’s racial strife. The authors emphasize making this a lifelong journey and growing along the way. At the beginning of the book, the authors outline their vision of what this journey looks like. Beginning with *Encounter*, the white person meets a person of color. *Friendship* then occurs when a person of color’s experiences are heard and validated. Beyond friendship is a stage called *Displacement* where the white person puts him/herself in a minority reality in a diverse context. The key is to stay there and not flee. *Identity* is the next stage where the white person consolidates what they have learned and sees a significant cultural identity emerge as a white person. The final stage is *Just Community* where the white person learns to structurally advocate and become an ally of people of color. It is here where the white person finds freedom from shame and true interdependence with people of color.

For us to be a genuine community of believers living out Kingdom of God values of love, peace and justice, it is essential for the principles and concepts outlined in this book to become a reality. The challenging issues of white culture and white privilege being brought under the Lordship of Christ is a very real component to all of us building a community of justice and thus reflecting a true picture of Christ’s Body living in unity and sharing His love in this world. Read this book prayerfully and thoughtfully. Reflect on it’s content. Enjoy the teachings that the authors offer. Your journey on the road of reconciliation will be enriched as a result.

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#### References:

Harris, Paula, and Schaupp, Doug, *Being White: Finding our Place in a Multi-Ethnic World*. Downers Grove, IL. InterVarsity Press, 2004.