

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE EVANGELICAL CHURCH

We, the undersigned, are distressed about the continuing divide that persists in the North American evangelical church in the area of racial harmony. Certainly, we acknowledge that over the past several decades, the church has grown both in its understanding and pursuit of racial reconciliation. However, such efforts have largely been reduced to black-white relations, or they have resulted in tokenism, in which organizations or events allocate an appropriate number of spots to include voices of color and mistakenly believe that is all that is required.

We have imagined and hoped for such a different future for the church, one in which racial harmony would not be an illusion, but a tangible reality. However, as a number of incidents in recent years demonstrate, the evangelical church is still far from understanding what it truly means to be an agent of racial reconciliation. In particular, the Asian American segment of the church continues to be misunderstood, misrepresented, and misjudged.

We write this letter to collectively assert that which continues to trouble us about the church's treatment of Asian Americans and Asian culture, and to ask the church to make a more concerted effort to both understand and address the concerns of its Asian American brothers and sisters.

Over the past decade, Christian evangelicalism has been the source of repeated and offensive racial stereotyping, and Asian Americans have been inordinately affected. From [VBS curriculum](#), to [youth skits](#), to [general Christian trade books](#), Asians have been caricatured, mocked, or otherwise treated as foreigners outside the typical accepted realm of white evangelicalism. And the situation has not improved over time. Within just the past month alone, a [well-known Christian leader](#) and a [popular Christian conference](#) *(see postscript, below signatories) have also exhibited examples of poor judgment and Asian stereotyping.

And it has to stop.

As you can see by the number of names signing this letter, we are not (as some have accused us of in the past) a fringe group of online activists, clamoring for our 15 minutes of fame to further our own ends and platforms. We are a part of the body, we are North American Christians every bit as much as any other North American Christian, and we are weary, hurt, and disillusioned by the continuing offensive actions of our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. When one part of the body experiences pain, should not the whole body feel the repercussions? And yet the occurrences of cultural insensitivity and racial stereotyping have shown no sign of abating.

The incidents mentioned above are only the ones that received press or attention. For every one of these examples, we believe there are likely hundreds of other examples that never reached a similar level of notoriety. Although it is beyond unfortunate that these incidents happened at all, in many cases the reactions from the parties responsible towards the Asian Americans who have challenged them have been even worse than the initial stereotyping and ignorance. We have even been accused of lashing out against particular individuals or ministries out of a sense of jealousy or resentment, a characterization we wholeheartedly dispute.

When Asian Americans have raised these issues, those who are involved in these incidents have too often reacted defensively, dismissing and even deriding the concerns raised by their Asian American brothers and sisters, and only occasionally apologizing for any insensitive actions. Even more disturbing, when any of the followers of the evangelicals in question raised their own voices against Asian Americans, no matter how racist and hateful these voices have been, their leaders have not stepped in to stop these behaviors, thereby only fueling and furthering the disconnect between white and non-white Christians.

(As a side note: while the most recent public examples mentioned above have been connected with evangelical institutions, events, and individuals, we also know both subtle and blatant forms of racist actions are prevalent through the entirety of the body of Christ regardless of theological or ecclesiastical tradition, and our list of signatories below reflects this desire of Asian Americans both within and outside of the evangelical tradition to strive for racial harmony in the church.)

Lastly, in many of these occurrences of cultural insensitivity, we have seen a tendency amongst white Christians to point out that they know Asian Americans who weren't at all offended by what they did. So, the argument goes, this must mean that any Asian American who is upset is being overly sensitive. In response to this point, we would like to know how many offended Asian Americans it takes to catalyze cultural change? Is the list of signatories below enough? Take a moment to notice the breadth and the depth of the individuals who have assented that they, too, are tired of continuing racial insensitivity in the church. And embrace the truth: the evangelical church in America needs a reality check to honestly assess how it relates with its
Asian American family members.

We highly value the concept of family, and it deeply distresses us when our non-Asian brothers and sisters do not seem to recognize or embrace that we are called to be one united body. We are in your churches, your communities, your workplaces. Whenever you marginalize, ostracize, or demean us through carelessness and ignorance in print, video, or any other medium, you are doing more than just ruffling the feathers of a small group of online activists. You are damaging the very cause of Christ, by maintaining and increasing fissures within the church. You are furthering the exact opposite of what it means to be the church, which is to reflect Christ and his love through the power of a reconciled body. And you are creating an environment that will not only disillusion current Asian American Christians within the church body, but also repel Asian Americans who do not know Christ and who do not see him represented in the actions of those
who call themselves Christian.

We do believe in the power of the cross of Christ to bridge every and all possible divisions that come between human beings. But this can happen only if all parties lay aside pride and humbly say to one another, "Forgive us for where we have erred in our relationship with you. Help us to understand where you are coming from and how we can repair things between us." We are far from perfect, individually and collectively. We have not been without fault in how we have handled these situations, and we can do more to offer the grace and love of Christ. We, too, can
learn from others and acknowledge that we have our own insensitivities and
cultural blind spots.

So we want to publicly declare our willingness to engage in open dialogue and conversation on this topic, with anyone who is willing to enter into honest discussion about race and culture.

Asian American ministry programs have been launched all over the country, at institutions such as [Seattle Pacific University](#) (Billy Vo, director); [Talbot Seminary](#) (Benjamin Shin, director), [Fuller Seminary](#) (Ken Fong, executive director), and [ISAAC](#) (Young Lee-Hertig, executive director) so there is no dearth of resources in the broader church to learn more about Asian Americans and their valuable contributions to the body of Christ.

We also would ask those who have influence in evangelical circles to consider the following specific action items:

- Convening a forum of Asian Americans to be published in *Christianity Today* to discuss these ongoing incidents of racial stereotyping, both to educate the wider evangelical body as well as to catalyze change within the church
- Examining hiring practices in Christian organizations, particularly in the areas of media and publishing, to see if there are systemic issues preventing Asian Americans from having a presence and a voice in the evangelical world
- Committing to a higher standard of evaluating any media or public content to respectfully reflect Asian American culture

We, the undersigned, offer ourselves as sounding boards and consultants if you have questions about how a particular action or choice might affect Asian Americans in the church. Just imagine the possibilities if we can finally progress together as one body, as one family of God, pursuing true reconciliation and racial harmony together.

(Please note: institutions whose names appear below are for identification purposes only, and the opinions expressed above should be solely attributed to the signatories below, not to the institutions with which they are associated.)

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