

## Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Done Right: Disentangling Christian community from critical theory

Thanks to Marcus for inviting me to speak today. My name is Dr. Neil Shenvi and I'm not that kind of doctor. I'm just a lowly theoretical chemist who's been asked to speak to you today about "Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Done Right: Disentangling Christian community from critical theory."

The phrase "Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion" elicits vastly different responses from different people. Liberals tend to view DEI as a crucial component of any institution truly committed to "social justice" – there's another buzzword. Conservatives tend to view DEI as empty virtue-signaling at best and a wholly corrupted enterprise at worst. So which is it?

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Well, here's the bad news. I'm going to argue that *most* DEI programs are rooted in contemporary critical theory, a deeply unbiblical ideology that Christians must reject. This fundamentally unbiblical understanding of "Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion" is so ubiquitous that I'm not very comfortable with Christians using the phrase "Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion."

Now, since Marcus invited me and since he's the director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at Life Pacific University, I have about ten seconds to turn this talk around before he shuts off my mic and cuts the video, right? Well, maybe. But hear me out. My claim is that while most DEI programs are rooted in critical theory, we can think about these concepts in ways that are compatible with Christianity. In other words, we can see our churches, universities, and institutions as places where diversity, equity, and inclusion can be fostered *provided that we define these terms in a biblical way and explicitly reject definitions rooted in critical theory*. My aim here today is to show you how to do that.

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Here's my outline. First, I'd like to show you that something is happening to our culture, impacting everything from social media, to entertainment, to education, to DEI training. Second, I'd like to give that "Something" a name: contemporary critical theory. I'll explain the four central tenets of contemporary critical theory without offering any critique and I'll even show that secular DEI programs are attempting to address some real problems. But third, I'll show that a pursuit of diversity, equity, and inclusion based on critical theory is fundamentally flawed. As Christians, we simply cannot accept critical theorists' understanding of oppression, justice, diversity, equity, inclusion, and a host of other concepts. Fourth, I'll offer some biblical guiderails for thinking about DEI. And finally, I'll offer a way forward in terms of having fruitful dialogue about these issues.

Also, don't worry about taking notes. All these slides and the entire transcript for the talk are available on my website, and I'll give you the URL at the end.

### I. What is going on with our culture?

So let's first ask: "What is going on with our culture?"

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Let's start with some data, since I'm a scientist and I love data. Here's a chart of word usage frequency from the NYTimes. Around 2014, you can see the beginning of an event which some cultural commentators have dubbed "The Great Awakening." Words like "racism" "privilege" "whiteness" and "intersectionality" suddenly exploded all over the pages of the NYTimes.

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Here's another example. In 2020, the Smithsonian Institute published an infographic on "The Aspects and Assumptions of Whiteness and White Culture." It listed things like "objective, rational linear thinking" and "cause and effect relationships" and ideas like "hard work is the key to success" as elements of "whiteness." Now, we might expect to see statements like that on a Neo-nazi manifesto, but on an infographic published by the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture? What in the world is going on? And are these ideas only related to race? No.

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Here are some quotes from the statement of beliefs page on the official Black Lives Matter website. They say that they want to "do the work required to dismantle cisgender privilege and uplift Black trans folk." And that they "foster a queer-affirming network" and want to free themselves from "the tight grip of heteronormative thinking." They sell T-shirts that say "Black Future is Queer."

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Here's an example from a CNN news article. It states: "It's not possible to know a person's gender identity at birth, and there is no consensus criteria for assigning sex at birth." Note: this is not an opinion piece. This is supposedly news. The highlighted sentence stayed in the piece for 24 hours before it was eventually removed.

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Finally, the television show Blue's Clues, which is targeted at preschoolers, released a Pride Month sing-along video set to the tune of "The Ants Go Marching." The lyrics included these stanzas "These babas are non-binary / They love each other so proudly.../Ace, bi and pan grown-ups you see can love each other so proudly / And they all go marching in the Big Parade." Ace-, bi-, and pan- refers to asexual, bisexual, and pansexual, for those who aren't sure. And notice that one of the beavers in the video was portrayed with double-mastectomy scars. In other words, this character represents a biological female who had her breasts removed by gender reassignment surgery.

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We say these ideas in dozens of books by scholars like Robin DiAngelo and Ibram X. Kendi. And we can see these ideas in DEI training programs all over the country. Conservative activist Chris Rufo has provided hundreds of pages of primary source documents from DEI trainings at major corporations and schools.

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Here are some examples from a Walmart Training program. Employees were told that racism is a "system of racial advantage that benefits white people," that POC can suffer from "internalized racial

oppression,” and that “white supremacy culture” includes things like “worship of the written word,” “individualism,” and “objectivity.”

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AT&T recommended books like DiAngelo’s *White Fragility*, and Kendi’s *Stamped from the Beginning*.

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A middle-school teachers training program asked attendees to locate themselves on an “oppression matrix” listing “racism,” “sexism,” “classism,” “heterosexism,” “ableism,” and “adultism” as various forms of oppression.

These artifacts are just the tip of the ice berg. So: what is the ice berg? In other words, where are these ideas coming from? That’s what I want to explain in the next section.

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## **II. What is critical theory?**

So, second, what is “critical theory”?

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Critical theory today is an umbrella term which encompasses many different critical social theories including entire disciplines like cultural studies, postcolonialism, critical pedagogy, postmodernism, feminism, black feminism, queer theory, and critical race theory. So what are the ideas at the core of contemporary critical theory?

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I’ll list four: the social binary, oppression through ideology, lived experience, and social justice.

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First, contemporary critical theory is based on the idea of the social binary.

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The “social binary” is the claim that society can be divided into dominant, oppressor groups and subordinate, oppressed groups along lines of race, class, gender, sexuality, and a host of other factors. Here are Sensoy and DiAngelo in their book *Is Everyone Really Equal?*: “For every social group, there is an opposite group... the primary groups that we name here are: race, class, gender, sexuality, ability status/exceptionality, religion, and nationality.” Consequently, “sexism, racism, classism, and heterosexism are specific forms of oppression.”

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They say a picture is worth a thousand words, so here’s a picture. This is figure 5.1 from their book. As you can see, it lists various forms of oppression: racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism, anti-Semitism, ableism, nationalism, colonialism. It lists the minoritized group: people of color, the poor, women, LGBTQ+ individuals. And it lists the dominant group: whites, the rich, men, heterosexuals, etc...

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Second, we have the idea of oppression through hegemonic power. What is “hegemonic power”?

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Here are Sensoy and DiAngelo again: “Hegemony refers to the control of the ideology of society. The dominant group maintains power by imposing their ideology on everyone.” This is crucial. Traditionally, ‘oppression’ is understood to refer to acts of cruelty, injustice, violence, and coercion. But critical theorists expand this definition to include ways in which the dominant social group, imposes its norms, values, and ideas on society to justify its own interests. Iris Young writes: “In its new usage, oppression designates the disadvantage and injustice some people suffer not because a tyrannical power coerces them, but because of the everyday practices of a well-intentioned liberal society... Its causes are embedded in unquestioned norms, habits, and symbols.”

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If you understand that dominance and oppression are produced not by numerical size, but by hegemonic power, you’ll understand why “old white men” are the canonical oppressor group. Demographically, only about 15% of the U.S. is “old white men.” So they’re actually a minority. But they are a dominant group because they have the power to impose their old white male values on society. We all accept these values as natural, objective, and common sense when actually, they serve old white male interests.

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Third: lived experience. Contemporary critical theory argues that ‘lived experience’ gives oppressed people special access to truths about their oppression

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Here’s an incredible quote from Anderson and Collins in their book *Race, Class, and Gender*. They write “The idea that objectivity is best reached only through rational thought is a specifically Western and masculine way of thinking – one that we will challenge throughout this book.”

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To put it simply, privileged groups tend to be blinded by their privilege. They have both conscious and subconscious reasons to avoid or ignore the reality of oppression. In contrast, by virtue of their “social location,” oppressed people have the possibility of “seeing through” the hegemonic discourse imposed on them by the ruling class. They can recognize that dominant social norms are really attempts to justify oppression and can thereby achieve what’s called a “liberatory consciousness.” Colloquially, they can “get woke.”

But that’s not automatic. Because we’re all socialized into the dominant group’s ideology, these oppressive ideas appear to be ‘natural’ and ‘common sense.’ So even oppressed people can experience ‘internalized oppression’ when they embrace the ideology of the dominant group, failing to see it for what it is: a bid for power.

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Finally, the motive force behind critical theory since its inception is the achievement of “social justice.”

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Listen to how feminist scholar Mary McClintock defines that term. She writes that “social justice” is “the elimination of all forms of social oppression” where that oppression can be based on “a person’s gender, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, physical or mental ability, or economic class.” In other words, critical theorists define “social justice” to mean the elimination of the oppressor-oppressed social binary by dismantling the systems and structures used to justify the hegemonic power of the ruling class: whether it’s the hegemonic power of whites, men, heterosexuals, or the rich.

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Now, if anyone has experience with diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, you’ll realize that these ideas are pervasive. The way DEI is implemented most places just assumes critical theory’s conceptualizations of the social binary, hegemonic power, lived experience, and social justice. That’s why it’s so important to understand critical theory when we’re trying to evaluate DEI initiatives. We need to understand the basic assumptions on which they’re built.

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But before I offer any critique of critical theory-based DEI programs, let me call attention to some of the positive aspects of these initiatives. Even if we strongly disagree with their ideological foundations, like I do, we should recognize that they’re trying to solve real problems that Christians can acknowledge.

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First, let’s talk about diversity. Is diversity always bad? Is it always godless and “worldly”? Well, no. Some kinds of diversity are God-ordained and can be celebrated. Think about Paul’s entire argument in 1 Cor. 12 about how God gives a diversity of spiritual gifts to the local church. One of his main points is that the church would be impoverished if everyone had the same gifts. Similarly, a local church that providentially includes people from multiple tribes, nations, and tongues is one that looks more like the picture of God’s Kingdom that we see in Rev. 7. So certain kinds of diversity are good and God-ordained.

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Second, let’s talk about “equity” which is often contrasted with “formal equality.” “Formal equality” or “procedural equality” means that laws and policies treat every equally. But does that guarantee actual equality of opportunity? Not necessarily. Simply example: after the Civil War and the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Amendments, former slaves had all the formal, legal rights and privileges of other American citizens *in theory*. Does it follow that they had the same opportunities? Or even the same legal rights *in practice*? Absolutely not. Many of them ended up as sharecroppers whose lives were only marginally better than they had been under slavery. So formal equality under law does not guarantee equality of opportunity.

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Third, DEI programs argue that because formal equality is not enough, therefore we need to embrace “equity” which means explicitly embracing unequal treatment. That’s rightly controversial, but is it always wrong? No. There are many cases where unequal treatment is actually good and just. For example, wheelchair ramps. Are those unfair? Can’t people in wheelchairs use stairs. Well, no, they

can't. That's exactly the point. What about handicapped parking spaces? What about free and reduced lunches for children in poverty? In all these cases, almost everyone recognizes that unequal treatment is justified because the goal is equal opportunity. We want to ensure that everyone has access to the same public goods. So there are cases where unequal treatment is nonetheless just and fair.

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Fourth, institutional culture can sometimes unintentionally exclude or marginalize people and DEI tries to fix that. And that can be fine. Where the Bible is silent, we can be flexible about our own cultural traditions, out of love for our brothers and sisters outside our culture.

So these are all problems that DEI initiatives are trying to address and that we can appreciate as Christians.

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That said, there are a number of places where DEI programs go fundamentally wrong, from a Christian perspective.

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First, DEI programs rooted in critical theory redefine oppression, which leads to a false view of inclusion. In an earlier slide, I showed an "Oppression Matrix" used at a teacher training session in Missouri. That table probably came from the "Matrix of Oppression" in Appendix C of Adams' *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice*. Notice that racism and sexism are listed as oppressions right alongside heterosexism. Why? Because critical theorists have redefined the word "oppression."

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Here are some quotes from Adams' book. She writes: "'We do not use traditional or popular meanings of oppression (such as a ruler's tyrannical rule or a nation's conquest and colonial domination of other peoples)... **Oppression is 'structural' and 'systemic,' and usually operates under the radar because it is part of an unequal society's 'unquestioned norms, habits, and symbols'; its 'normal processes of everyday life'; and 'oppression is manifested through racism, white privilege, and immigrant status; sexism, heterosexism, and transgender experiences; religious oppression and antisemitism; and classism, ableism, and ageism/adultism...**eradicating oppression ultimately requires **struggle against all its forms.**" Note here that critical theorists will not allow you to claim that you are going to fight against racism but still believe that heterosexuality and the gender binary are good, God-ordained norms for humanity. They insist that it can't be done. You must oppose racism, and sexism, and heterosexism, and cisgenderism at the same time.

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Ibram X. Kendi says the same thing in his book *How to Be An Antiracist*. For example, he writes: "**We cannot be antiracist if we are homophobic or transphobic...** To be queer antiracist is to understand the privileges of my cisgender, of my masculinity, of my heterosexuality, of their intersections."

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And it's not just race, class, gender, and sexuality that are seen through the lens of power and oppression. Even the parent-child relationship is problematized by critical theorists. Did anyone notice the row for "ageism/adultism" in the oppression matrix I showed? Adultism occurs when adults oppress children by imposing their adult values on them and depriving them of agency (even their own children). For example, in their essay "Understanding and fighting sexism: a call to men," Blood, Tuttle, and Lakey write: "People are just beginning to have a glimpse of what **oppression based on age involves...** Children are ... being considered helpless, dependent, and cute - creatures to be cherished and taken care of... but not full human beings to be deeply respected... and trusted with significant power. They experience **10-15 years of unpaid labor and brainwashing in our current form of education.**"

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Unfortunately, it gets worse. Within Queer Theory, it is an open question of whether "intergenerational sex" or "pedophilia" or "man-boy love" can be moral. In her book, *Queer Theory, an Introduction*, Jagose writes: "the issue of intergenerational sex continues to be debated vigorously in many gay and lesbian communities. The protection of children is deemed by some to be ethically crucial to the development of gay identity, but **is dismissed by others as 'erotic hysteria'** (Rubin, 1993:6). What is the status of different, and arbitrary, age-of-consent laws? **Do children have a sexuality and a right to sexual agency? Why is age –unlike, say, race or class– understood as a sexualized power-differential protected by law? Is it possible to eroticise children in an ethical way?** These are the questions commonly raised–and by no means yet resolved– in the controversy over intergenerational sex"

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I spent a lot of time on this section, because Christians seem to still think they can adopt critical theory's redefinition of the word "oppression" and yet only apply it to racism. That simply isn't true. Biblically speaking (and according to most dictionaries), "oppression" refers to violence, cruel treatment, control, and tyranny. It does not refer to "socially dominant groups imposing their values on culture." Critical theory's definition, you'll have to apply it consistently to *all* socially dominant groups, whether whites, men, heterosexuals, Christians, or cisgendered people. And you'll have to commit to dismantling not just whiteness, but patriarchy, heteronormativity, the gender binary, ableism and a host of other purported systemic oppressions. And "inclusion" in DEI initiatives will demand that you include not just people of different races and ethnicities, but people who emphatically reject a biblical sexual ethic. Again, that's not something Christians can embrace. So we have to reject critical theory's redefinition of "oppression" at the very outset.

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Second, critical theorists adopt the word "equity" rather than "equality" even though the two are synonyms in most dictionaries.

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Here's a popular cartoon that explains how "equity" is reconceptualized by critical theory. "Equality" refers to everyone being treated exactly the same, whereas "equity" refers to some people being treated differently in order to offset their disadvantages. Now, critical theorists will sometimes insist that all "equity" seeks is "equality of opportunity" not "equality of outcome", as in the case on wheelchair ramps.

However, that's usually misleading. What advocates of equity usually assume is that *if* there are unequal outcomes, *then* there must not have been equality of opportunity. So, effectively, what they're committed to is "quality of outcome," even would deny that.

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Here's an example from a short video posted to Twitter by VP candidate Kamala Harris. She explains that the problem with "equality" is that not everyone starts in the same place so that some people need extra help or resources to overcome their initial disadvantages. So how can we tell how much help they need? How can we tell when "equity" has been achieved? She explains "equitable treatment means we all end up at the same place." So be very careful here of the bait-and-switch. On paper, equity might look like it is merely an attempt to achieve equal opportunity. But in practice, it assumes that unequal outcomes are all attributable to "lack of equity."

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Antiracist activist Ibram X. Kendi says this extremely clearly in his books. For example, he writes "**racial discrimination is the sole cause of racial disparities in this country and in the world at large.**" Think about that for a second. Do we really think that -say- disparities between North Korea and Sweden or between Africa and Australia or between Hispanic Americans and Native Americans are solely the result of discrimination? Do we really believe that 75% of players in the NBA are black because of racial discrimination? But this is exactly what Kendi's claims entail. In fact, he says elsewhere that if you think that racial disparities are caused even partially by anything other than discrimination, then you are -in his words- "an assimilationist racist." Along with Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Martin Luther King, Booker T. Washington, by the way. So at least you're in good company.

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So how should we respond to this redefinition of the word "equity" to effectively refer to unequal outcomes. First, we need to recognize that group-level disparities often conceal tremendous individual-level differences. For example, recall the picture of the three children trying to watch the baseball game. The short child who can't see over the fence is supposed to represent "underprivileged" groups like Blacks, Hispanics, women, disabled people, etc. But is that accurate when it comes to individuals? Think about it. Do you really think Barack Obama's two girls need a box to stand on? That's actually incredibly insulting. Thinking purely in terms of groups will obscure the fact that it would actually be *unfair* to divert resources from, say, a poor white student whose parents never graduated high school to a rich Black student whose parents are both doctors based solely on their races.

Second, we need to recognize that good and just systems produce disparities. Take education. One study found that Asian high school students spend about 13 hours per week doing homework compared to around 6 hours per week for whites. Now, imagine you have a perfectly unbiased, fair educational system. Do you really think that whites and Asians will get the same grades when one group studies twice as much, on average? Now, are our systems perfect and just. By no means. But we can't simply assume that disparities are necessarily evidence of injustice.

I'll skip the next three points for the sake of time, but



Third, not all attempts to rectify disparities are permissible. Take wealth disparities. Do you want to get rid of them? Simply. Just get rid of private property. Disparities in incarceration rates? Just put some innocent people in jail. Yes, that's monstrous. But that's my point. This simple dichotomy of racist vs. antiracist policies is dangerously simplistic. Some anti-racist policies that would indeed eliminate disparities are nevertheless evil.

Fourth, unintended consequences matter. A good example is "ban the box" laws. Because Blacks job applicants are more likely to have been incarcerated than White applicants, activists lobbied to pass "ban the box" laws which prohibited employers from asking about prior incarceration. That sound like it would decrease racial hiring discrimination? But what was the result? Racial discrimination *increased* because when employers were prevented from asking about incarceration explicitly, they just used race as a proxy for incarceration. That's just one example of how a well-intentioned law can backfire to harm the very people it's intended to help. And that's another reason why the racist/antiracist dichotomy is dangerous. It's simplistic and doesn't account for unintended consequences.

Finally, we have to be aware of the pipeline problems. For example, let's say a hospital notices that only 5% of its doctors are Hispanic. Roughly 18% of the US population is Hispanic, which means there's a significant ethnic disparity in the number of Hispanic doctors. So is the solution to recruit the hospital's racist hiring practices? Not necessarily. Why? Because only 5% of medical school graduates are Hispanic. Therefore, rather than asking "why isn't this hospital hiring more Hispanic doctors?" we should probably be asking "why aren't more Hispanic people graduating from medical school?" And that's not a problem that can be solved by changing a single hospital's hiring practices.

The bottom line here is: it's complicated. An equity-based "disparity equals discrimination" model is too simplistic. It may end up doing more harm than good and it may end up implementing unjust policies in the name of "social justice."

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Finally, DEI programs and critical theory in general tend to center the "lived experience" of marginalized groups, whether women, or people of color, or LGBTQ people, or disabled people. Now, I have no problem with *including* the voices of groups that may have been ignored in the past. But critical theorists have something very different in mind.

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For example, recall that Andersen and Collins wrote "The idea that objectivity is best reached only through rational thought is a specifically **Western and masculine way of thinking** – one that we will challenge throughout this book."

They're not merely saying "listening to more people's perspectives will help us overcome our biases." They're saying that we need to be skeptical of "rational thought" itself, which tends to be deployed to justify the power of cis-het white men.

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Or listen to Oluo from her book *So You Want to Talk About Race?* She asks "When is a particular incident like a police shooting actually about race and when is it about something else?" She writes: "**It is about**

**race if a person of color thinks it is about race...** whether or not someone is fallible is beside the point. We are, each and every one of us, a collection of our lived experiences...And **our experiences are valid.**"

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Closer to home, Latasha Morrison is the founder of Be The Bridge a Christian organization whose mission is "to empower people and culture toward racial healing, equity and reconciliation." Yet the Whiteness 101 document from their Facebook group instructs whites: Don't equate impact with intent...your words or behavior had a negative impact on those around you, and that's what matters. **Apologize and do better next time. Don't demand proof of a POC's lived experience or try to counter their narrative with the experience of another POC... Provide space for POCs to wail, cuss, or even yell at you...** When a POC tells you that your words/tone/behavior are racist/oppressive/triggering, **you stop. Don't try to explain yourself.**

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In all these cases, we see how a person of color's "lived experience" takes a priority over objective evidence, reasoned discussion, or even over Scripture commands about how we are speak to our brothers and sisters in Christ. That's bad.

As Christians, we have to insist that: Our compassion must be grounded in truth. That our emotions must be reformed to Scripture. And that our experiences must be recognized as fallible. We dare not allow anyone, whether white or Black or purple, to place their lived experience beyond the scrutiny of Scripture, objective evidence, or open dialogue.

## IV. Reclaiming Christian community

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I've just offered a strident critique of DEI programs based on critical theory, but I certainly don't want to stop there. As Christians, we need to have something better to offer. It's fine to reject the poison. It's crucial. But we also want to offer people food. So in this section, let me quickly lay our four basic principles that need to guide any Christian diversity program.

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First, for the Christian, Scripture has to be the foundation of all we do and think. Take the very concept of "diversity." People love to appeal to the glorious vision of heaven in Rev. 7. And they're right. In heaven, we will see "a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages." That should shape how we think about ethnic diversity. However, let's not forget what comes next. That great multitude was doing what? "standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, '**Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb**'" In other words, let's not miss what brings this great multitude together: the adoration of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. This is not an encomium to diversity for diversity's sake. Here, worship is the goal and diversity is a product of that worship.

To put it another way, listen to the words of Shai Linne from his excellent book *The New Reformation: "Ethnic diversity is not virtuous in and of itself. Hell is also a very diverse place. . . . Unity is not virtuous in itself. Hell is also a very unified place."*

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What about "equity"? How does Scripture shape our views on "equity"? Well, in numerous places in Scripture, we're commanded to judge impartially and without favoritism. In particular, the Israelites were forbidden from showing partiality either to the rich or to the poor. At the very least, that means we have to be exceptionally careful when applying unequal treatment. Wheelchair ramps? Sure. Race-based grading (and yes, that has actually been suggested). Look, no.

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Finally, what are we to think about "lived experience"? Like everything else, it has to be subjected to the scrutiny of Scripture and to objective evidence. No of us is infallible and we dare not let anyone's opinions become unchallengeable.

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What are some other guideposts?

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Here's one: mission over diversity. Listen: I think diversity is generally a good thing because we live in a diverse country. It's good to personally know people who are brothers and sisters in Christ with different ethnic backgrounds, different jobs, different educations, different socio-economic statuses. That's a blow to our ethnocentrism, our clannishness, our academic snobbery. But all that diversity is a byproduct of the gospel. What? Do we not believe in the sovereignty and power of God? Has not God elected people from every tribe, nation, and tongue? Has not God given us a mission to reach the world? So friends, preach the gospel because it will unite people across lines of race, class, and gender. Let's stop the navel-gazing and look outward. You want to see diverse people united? Preach the gospel that unites them. Preach the finished work of Christ. Preach him breaking down the dividing wall of hostility. Preach sin, redemption, and regeneration and you will find people who couldn't stand each other before worshipping before the throne.

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Third, opportunity over equity.

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I apologize for the grizzly nature of this cartoon, but it illustrates the problem with "equity" well. If "equity" is our only goal, then what is the limiting principle? If we're allowed to treat some people unequally, then what exactly is disallowed? Let's say I want to attain test score equity. Am I allowed to just abolish tests? Am I allowed to give everyone in a particular racial group an "F" to even out the averages? So here's my suggestion: focus on *procedures* not on outcomes and on *individuals* rather than on groups. Ask whether a particular procedure denies access to particular individuals (e.g. online-only applications deny access to people without the internet; in-person campus interviews deny access to

people who can't afford a flight); if it is, remedy it. But don't make sweeping policy changes based on nothing more than vague notions of "equity."

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Fourth, we should recognize that institutional cultures can marginalize certain groups.

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For example, the only female student in an all-male engineering program or the only male student in an all-male nursing may (*may*) feel uncomfortable, not only because of sinful discrimination but also simply because they're different. Paul shows us the response in 1 Cor. 8: love. Lay down your preferences to build others up. And that principle actually goes in both directions. People in the majority culture needs to be asking, how can we sacrifice our preferences to make others feel welcome. But people in the minority culture need to remind themselves that they should be willing to forego their preferences *as well* for the sake of their brothers and sisters.

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Finally, truth over feelings

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look at these pictures. The alt-right rally in Charlottesville. A Hands Up-Don't Shoot Sign from the Michael Brown protests. Ahmaud Arbery. The 1898 Wilmington Race Riot. Jussie Smollett. The 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre. They probably call up strong emotions. But are all those emotions necessarily correct? No. Sometimes our emotions are appropriate and grounded in truth. Sometimes they are inappropriate because they are based on error. We're called to offer people truth in love and to reform our own feelings to the truth when there's a disconnect. Our feelings don't determine truth.

## **V. A Way Forward**

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Finally, let me suggest a model for how the church can approach conversations around diversity, equity, and inclusion. I'm going to rely heavily on the work of George Yancey, a Black evangelical sociologist.

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On pages 40-46 of his new book *Beyond Racial Division*, he describes his "mutual accountability" model in terms of active listening, shared responsibility, and practical focus. First, his model is primarily about dialogue or what he calls "collaborative conversations." It demands that we listen to what the "other side" is saying and then restate their arguments in our own words so that they can say "Yes, that's my argument. You understand what I'm saying." It also demands that we share responsibility. Yes, people from the majority culture will likely have to make more adjustments than people from the minority culture. But whites are not there to simply "shut up and listen." All people are called on to provide input and offer solutions. And finally, George's approach is practical. It doesn't call on people to "adopt an antiracist identity" or "commit their lives to social justice." It focuses on specific problems and seeks to build a consensus, compromise solution that everyone can endorse.

Now, I'm not even sure I agree with everything George writes. But that's ok. That's one of his main points. We don't have to agree on absolutely anything in order to have fruitful conversations about these topics. He's giving us a model for dialogue that the church desperately needs. So let me try to apply his methodology to a hypothetical example.

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Here's the scenario: A small Bible college has a student body that is 80% white and a faculty that is 90% white. A number of Black students have expressed dissatisfaction at the lack of Black representation. In response, the administration has committed to creating a student body that is 30% non-White and a faculty that is 20% non-White by 2025. A group of anonymous students and parents has written an open letter protesting the adoption of "Critical Race Theory" by the college.

Now, how should we, as Christians, approach this problem? Should students take over the college president's office, hand him a list of 34 demands, and threaten to go to MSNBC unless he meets them all? Should the trustees demand the resignation of all "woke" faculty and set up a tribunal to interrogate prospective students for signs of wokeness? No. We start by listening. What are both "sides" saying?

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Here's the "progressive" side of the issue. And notice I didn't call it the "person of color" perspective or the "Black perspective." Why? Because people are individuals. They have their own thoughts. They don't just regurgitate the talking points of their gender or ethnic group. So what concerns do they raise? They point out that this Bible college was founded by whites trying to avoid school integration. At the time, Blacks were explicitly prohibited from attending. Given its history, Blacks are uncomfortable applying to the college. And is it any wonder? When people say "oh, but we got rid of those policies decades ago" ask yourself "how old are the incoming class members parents and grandparents?" If your own father remembers being forbidden to attend, do you really think you'll be eager to apply? Furthermore, POC on campus feel culturally isolated. Listen, before you start calling people "snowflakes" and demanding that they "grow up" think about how this feels. Imagine you went to a church service in sandals and Birkenstocks and everyone else was wearing a suit and tie. You didn't know any of the songs. You didn't get any of the cultural references in the sermons. After the service, there was a potluck and you didn't like any of the food. Now, if you're a mature Christian, can you overlook all that for the sake of the gospel? Absolutely yes. But if that church is full of mature Christians, how will they respond? Will they sneer at you and tell you to suck it up? Absolutely not. They will say, how can we let him know he's welcomed and beloved as a brother in Christ?

Finally, when George Floyd and Ahmaud Arbery were murdered, there was largely silence. Not lamentation. Not an expression of concern. Not prayer. Just silence. By the way, I'm not saying we should jump to conclusions. We have due process in the country for a reason. But obviously we can lament that a person was killed and pray that the justice would be done without making any pronouncements about guilt or innocence.

Slide 66:

Next, let's listen to conservatives. What are they saying? First, they point out that the school has rejected its segregationist origins and no longer discriminates against Blacks. Second, they insist that racial preferences in hiring violates the Bible's prohibitions of partiality. The exclusion of Black students

was wrong precisely because it violated God's commands; therefore, we're going to fix the problem by violating these same commands in a different direction? Third, is the college student body disproportionately white relative to the U.S. as a whole? Yes. But is it disproportionately white relative to its local community? Not really. It actually matches the demographics of local community pretty well. Finally, student protests promoted the Black Lives Matter organization, which suggests that at least some students may be embracing unbiblical ideologies surrounding issues of race and gender. That's concerning.

Ok, so what's the solution? How can we make everyone happy?

Slide 67:

I don't know. What do you want from me? I'm a theoretical chemist, not a magician. And, to be fair, George Yancey doesn't give you solutions either. Instead, he gives you a process by which your institution can come up with solutions. But let me at least offer some suggestions to show you how compromise can be possible.

Slide 68:

First, create a **multi-perspective** council on race. This is how we create dialogue. We have to bring people together to discuss these issues in front of an open Bible. Now, let me pause here. I didn't say "create a multi-racial council on race." I said "create a multi-perspective council on race." That was very deliberate.

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Here's what too many churches and institutions and corporations do. You get six people on a panel whose views range from ultra-woke to moderately woke and say: "Look, here's our diverse panel on race in America. Look how we're fostering open dialogue." You are not fostering dialogue. You are disguising a monologue as a dialogue.

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And that can happen on both sides of this discussion. A panel that consists of 6 anti-woke Christians is not a panel, it's a morality play.

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If you're going to have a real panel, you need to include charitable, articulate people who hold vastly different perspectives and let them talk. Look, here's Life Pacific University, doing it right. Let's be aspirational. You want your audience to identify with someone on the panel and to be challenged by someone on the panel. Then require everyone to defend their views on the basis of Scripture. No one gets a pass on that.

Slide 72

Second, consider actively recruiting Black students. Note this doesn't involve altering your standards in any way. It simply recognizes that prospective Black students, unlike White students, may be hesitant to apply. Unlike white students, they may not have connections to alumni who would encourage them to apply. You can fix that.

Third, partner with local schools and communities, especially if any have significant minority populations. Look, you say you've changed. Good! But now you can rebuild trust. Send your students in to tutor at the middle and high-school level. Bring kids onto campus for classes. You're not changing your standard; you're just raising awareness.

Again, for the sake of time, I'll skip the last three items and perhaps we can return to them in the Q&A.

Fourth, many people are extremely reluctant to considering race at all in admissions or hiring. In fact, surveys show that a majority of people from all races (58% Asian, 62% Black, 72% White) believe that race or ethnicity should not be a factor at all in college admissions decisions. That said, let me play devil's advocate. If you're a missions organization and you find two equally qualified candidates, one of whom is an indigenous believer and one of whom is a foreigner. All things being equal, who do you hire? Almost all missions agencies would hire the indigenous believer. Why? Are they prejudiced against foreigners? Not at all. Rather, an indigenous believer has numerous but hard-to-quantify qualifications: he knows the culture, he's a native speaker, he probably has some local connections. Here's another example. If you're hiring a campus minister to run a Christian fellowship at MIT, all things being equal, would you rather hire a MIT alumnus or a graduate of a tiny liberal arts college in the Pacific Northwest. The MIT alumnus. Why? Bigotry? No, same reasons.

Now, is there any sense in which this applies to candidates from different ethnic backgrounds? I think so. There is a sense in which missionaries and pastors are teachers are better positioned to reach certain cultures and subcultures than others. In other words, a person's ethnicity can be seen as a kind of secondary qualification. Now, two major caveats. I think this argument works much better for culture than it does for ethnicity. For example, a "White" missionary kid who grew up in India and is a native Hindi speaker may be a lot more familiar with Indian culture than a kid with Indian ancestry whose family has been living on a farm in Iowa for 3 generations. Second, this argument in no way alters or modified biblical qualifications for leadership. If you don't meet the qualifications for leadership laid out in Scripture, it doesn't matter how familiar you are with someone's culture. You are not qualified to lead.

Now, am I comfortable with this argument for making race a consideration in admissions/hiring? Frankly, no. However, I'm trying to present the other side's arguments as charitably as possible. That's part of active listening.

Fifth, rather than setting quotas, change procedures. If your goal is to hit some percentage, you'll be tempted to bend admissions guidelines to meet that number. So focus on making justifiable changes to procedures without knowing in advance whether they will get you to a certain number; that way you'll be less tempted to offer post hoc rationalizations for why the changes were justifiable.

Sixth, invite a series of outside speakers to give talks on race and theology. Can't agree on a single speaker? Have several, each of whom will offer a different perspective,

Finally, acknowledge the school's racial history. Don't hide it. Bring it out in the open and let people see you've changed.

Now, this list isn't comprehensive. It's not authoritative. The point of the "mutual accountability" model is that Christians need to find solutions to these problems in community. We need to dialogue in front of

an open Bible. One side can't impose their solutions on everyone else. And everyone has to submit their ideas and plans to the scrutiny of Scripture.

Slide 73:

Second, read broadly. Too often, progressives only read progressive books about race and conservatives only read conservative books about race. If anything, people should try to read books that challenge their perspectives rather than merely reinforcing it.

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So read diverse authors. Yes, all these guys are black men. What? Do you think black men all have the same ideas about race? Wrong. People are individuals, not avatars of their racial groups. So read Coates, Sowell, Kendi, McWhorter, Loury, and West. Get diverse perspectives. And here are a handful of other suggestions:

Slide 75:

First, Prof. George Yancey's *Beyond Racial Gridlock*. As I've discussed his model for racial unity is based on mutual accountability, open dialogue, and a recognition of our own sinfulness. I prefer this older, longer book to his more recent *Beyond Racial Division* and George and I don't agree on everything. But I fully endorse his approach to healthy discussion.

Slide 76:

Second, Bryan Stevenson's *Just Mercy*. Stevenson's book is mainly a memoir about his own work as a lawyer working to exonerate the wrongfully incarcerated. It's a beautiful book, touching, heartfelt, and redemptive. If nothing else, it will spark good conversations about race and justice.

Slide 77:

Third, Shai Linne's *The New Reformation*. Deeply grounded in the gospel and biblical theology. Linne has clearly listened carefully to both sides of this discussion.

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Fourth, Thaddeus Williams' *Confronting Injustice Without Compromising Truth*. A very accessible comparison of biblical justice and the secular social justice movement.

Slide 79:

Finally, any Christian DEI initiative has to be grounded in our unity in Christ. We don't create this unity. We don't manufacture it. We don't work for it. It was purchased for us by Jesus on the cross 2,000 years ago. It is a fact. All we're called to do is to live it out. To maintain it. To display it. Critical theory divides the world up into oppressed groups and their oppressors along lines of race, class, and gender. Christianity says: no. You are all made in the Image of God. You are all fallen, corrupt rebels who were dead in sin. And you have now been brought into the family of God through the life, death, and Resurrection of Jesus. The walls between Jew and Greek, male and female, slave and free have all been broken down. You are all one now in Christ Jesus.

Slide 80:



Shai Linne writes: “I, as a Black, dreaded, hip-hop head from West Philly, have fundamentally more in common with a White coal miner from the mountains for West Virginia, a White stay-at-home mom from South Dakota, or an aging Chinese-American doctor from the Bay Area –if they are Christians– than I have with my Black, hip-hop head cousin from South Philly who doesn’t know Christ! **This is the glory and beauty of the new humanity**” Amen. Let’s live like this.