

Position Paper on Diversity

Why and why now?

Considering all that has changed at Criswell College in the past few years—for example: 10-year reaffirmation, Criswell 360°, Stanton-Ouellette Residence Hall—and the attention which must be paid to grow enrollment, it may seem a distraction to prioritize diversity right now. But there are reasons for including a specific initiative about diversity in the college's strategic plan. How important it seems to the current campus environment depends significantly on the experience of distinct individuals. Criswell College is not immune to the often-unintentional biases which sometimes slightly, sometimes severely impact minority staff, faculty, and student populations. As an example: one of our Black students had an anxious encounter with security on campus for doing no more than entering the building with his key card to find a missing backpack. In my conversation with the student shortly after the encounter, the sincerity of his fear and the hesitation it gives him to describe Criswell as a safe place for prospective Black students was matched by his complete absence of malice to the school or for the encounter. In many conversations with alumni and current students, I have become increasingly aware that as a college, we have unwittingly closed the gate to several populations we could effectively serve otherwise. The diversity initiative begins opening those gates.

The college's purpose, along with the administration's, is not diversity. The mission of the college is for staff and administrators to provide an educational experience which will prepare all of our students to be ambassadors, cultivators, peacemakers, problem-solvers, and professionals grounded and grown in inerrant scripture. Diversity is just one of thirteen initiatives in a strategic plan designed to address the college's weaknesses or capitalize on its strengths. Diversity appears to be a high priority because it is an inherently divisive issue, and because any progress regarding such deep-seated issues requires a lot of effort.

Basic Means and Ends

The stated outcome of the diversity initiative is that the college provide stronger support for diverse populations. Implicit in that outcome are several intermediate ideas, including that the college should serve a larger number of students from currently under-reached and under-represented populations, and that serving and learning from diverse populations does not require compromising the doctrinal or moral commitments of the college.

Some approaches to promoting diversity are inadequate for the purposes of Criswell College. A few approaches to racism, for instance, are not only insufficient, but sometimes create their own barriers. At one end of the spectrum, "colorblindness" focuses on improvements which have already been made, ignores racial differences, and forgets past discriminations. "Anglo-conformity" encourages minorities to overcome economic inequalities by adopting "mainstream" values. On the opposite end of the spectrum, "Multiculturalists" overlook deficiencies in minority cultures to see moral failures only in the majority. A "white savior" approach tends to lay responsibility for racism and its solutions only on the white majority. Each of these models has some value respectively—seeing people without prejudice, inviting equal participation in society, valuing other cultures, acknowledging persistently inequitable systems. But each also has inherent shortcomings (George Yancey, *Beyond Racial Gridlock*, 29-74).

As those limitations exemplify, there is no panacea, no singular solution to diversity's barriers. But Criswell College is committed to making redemptive progress through relational means. The approach is relational because intentional interaction can promote mutual understanding and appreciation between diverse populations. The progress is redemptive because we believe acknowledging individual biases and systemic inequities ought to and can lead toward reconciliation between persons and the improvement of organizational and community structures.

Regarding the more applied side of the relational method, there is a difference between setting standards and establishing quotas. Quotas invite the appearance of diversity without providing support for diverse populations, and without necessarily gaining the benefits of diverse perspectives. In contrast to quotas, the college's standard for achieving diversity is to measure diversity among students, staff, and leadership against the population the college serves, and to do so iteratively. As long as diversity in the college lags diversity in the community it serves, the administration will work within the strategic plan to stimulate greater diversity. At first, the standard will compare the college's student population with its leadership. As the college grows toward a leadership reflective of the student population, measurements will move outward, to include, for example, a comparison of student and staff populations with demographics among Southern Baptists in North Texas, then Baptists in North Texas, then Baptists in the broader region; each time including a broader swath of the population Criswell College can serve. Additionally, as diversity (proper) grows in the college, the administration will begin assessing progress in areas of inclusion, equity, and justice to ensure that an increasingly diverse population is well served.

Definitions

The broad idea of diversity as addressed by many institutions of higher education includes four issues: diversity, inclusion, equity, and justice. Criswell College defines these four terms in order to make clearer how the college can address the needs of formerly under-represented and under-served populations, and that the concepts as defined complement (rather than compromise) the doctrinal commitments of the college.

Diversity: Improving representation of variety among race and ethnicity, men and women, national and regional origin, socioeconomic status, abilities and disabilities, and socio-political perspectives. Lacking diversity in any of these areas is cause for examining whether diversity in any of the other areas is merely token.

Inclusion: Increasing involvement of diverse constituents by opening or widening avenues of participation. Having diverse populations present is only the first step. The college must also measure and take steps to ensure that individuals and groups from diverse populations are participating in the full range of opportunities provided to everyone else.

Equity: Providing and equipping leadership for the equitable treatment of diverse participants. The college must train staff and faculty to observe inequities and adjust appropriately.

Justice: Encouraging the recognition and mitigation of bias, exclusion, or inequity.

Rhetoric

Inflammatory language has become de rigeur in contemporary discussions of diversity. Several terms have become thin caricatures of the concepts they originally identified: e.g., racism, CRT, gender, justice.

Others serve as straw men: e.g., woke, Marxist. As a result, ideas which could provide context for meaningful dialog are excluded entirely. Criswell College should be a place where ideas are discussed and then accepted or rejected on their merits, so these terms are not to be taken as judgments already completed, but as terms in arguments yet to be made—arguments to be judged as valid or invalid, sound or unsound, as they actually enter the discourse. In that light, here are some starting considerations regarding a handful of such terms.

Woke:

While few etymologies are certain, this term's history is not cryptic. By the early twentieth century, there are calls for Black citizens worldwide to wake up; that is, to become socially conscious and active. "Stay woke" finds its way into a Black protest song in the mid-twentieth century. The metaphor is as direct as Jemar Tisby's explanation: "...it implies that in some sense you were asleep to particular kinds of injustices and oppressions in the world, and now you've been awakened..." ("A History of Wokeness," *Vox News*). In that sense, being woke is no more dangerous than obeying Paul's edict to "awake to justice (ἐκνήψατε δικαίως)" in 1 Corinthians 15.

But that sense is not the only option in current discourse. Because some activists deliberately marry SOGI (Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity) issues to racial civil rights, "wokeness" emerges as a term for progressive activism in general. At the same time, the concept of "intersectionality" becomes a convenient matrimonial knot for race and sexuality, so that now, at least in the minds of some, anyone who advocates for racial justice is working with those who advocate for sexual progressivism and gender fluidity.

While some people do connect racial and SOGI social justice issues, it is a mistake to regard that connection as universal or necessary. Ascribing every belief of some creed to a person who shares some beliefs in that creed is a logical misstep. Criswell College should remain alert to injustices in its immediate context and broader culture, and moored to its doctrinal commitments. To avoid teaching about ministering to the oppressed or speaking out about injustice in order to protect the institution's doctrine would be to ignore an enormously significant portion of that very doctrine.

Marxist:

Marxism has been an epithet against advocates of diversity for as long as it has been an ideology. In one sense, the idea that Marxism and diversity stand on common ground is legitimate. A theoretical essential of Marxism (obviously not realized in practice) is the elimination of inequalities, which is an explicit goal of diversity, including the "equity" of the college's initiative. However, as with "woke" above, the overlap of one value does not represent identification with an entire ideology; and current accusations of Marxism are eerily reminiscent of similar critiques brought inaccurately and unjustly against Martin Luther King, Jr. and other civil rights advocates six decades ago.

In the case of Marxism and the current evangelical resistance to some diversity efforts there is an additional perceived entanglement: between Marxism's determinism and arguments that racism's structures are effectively inescapable. Determinism and materialism are assumptions of Marxism. In general, then, Marxists see liberty and individualism as problems for history and humanity to overcome. In some discussions of diversity, systems and structures are described as mitigating personal agency (freedom) in ways which seem very similar to Marxism; a suspected similarity only solidified by

philosophical Marxism's role in the origins of Critical Race Theory. But the implications of determinism and the implications of structural rigidity on human freedom are different. The idea that a context is inescapable (structural rigidity) does not imply determinism. For example, humans cannot escape physics, yet have practically boundless moral agency within its forces. In fact, the fixed elements of a context can invite greater creativity from free individuals, and do comprise an opportunity for individuals to assume responsibility for the things which can be changed—exactly the same relationship which exists between fallen creation and the morally free creatures within it.

Racism:

Racism is a term now so broadly defined and vaguely used that when it does turn up in a conversation it creates more heat than light and more confusion than clarity. Racism can refer to general prejudice based on race, specific prejudices of the majority against minorities, the creation and maintenance of systems which perpetuate majority power, or even the lack of action against such systems. Further, it can be about individuals (especially as in the case of simple prejudice) or about communities (especially regarding systems and structures).

It is uncontroversial that Criswell College opposes racism as prejudice, and therefore that personal acts of such racism are unacceptable. But the college should also recognize and address the broader reasons some populations are under-represented in the college's work. Because structures and systems form to maintain any status quo, it is unreasonable to think that no structures or systems preserving racial segregation emerged from 250 years of chattel slavery, 100 years of Jim Crow, and 50 years of racial tension since. Ruling systemic racism out of bounds for discussion serves no healthy interest: intellectual, social, or spiritual; indeed, prohibitions on engaging in discussions about it may preserve the very systems about which dialog is forbidden. The extent of those systems and structures, whether they are consciously or unconsciously preserved, and to what degree and when they can be significantly altered or dismantled are all matters for conversation. How systems are understood or rejected by either group is grist for empathy and learning in the other. As long as the term is adequately clarified, every form of racism is a legitimate topic for dialog at the college.

Critical Race Theory

CRT originally describes racism as intransigent in American culture because it is woven into the fabric and practice of American law. Further, "interest convergence" makes the case that improvements in conditions for minorities only come when those improvements bring advantages to the majority. Both of these CRT contentions leave society with few (or no) options for overcoming systemic racism, a conclusion rejected tout court by many who then contend not only that CRT is wrong in its conclusions, but that anything related to CRT should be entirely excluded from discussions about racism.

Two considerations argue against such ideological censorship. First, even if CRT's conclusions are entirely wrong, the theory itself may address social causes and symptoms which different approaches to racism and other social imperfections have not. Someone may rightly observe that a finger is broken and wrongly demand it be amputated. Refusing to amputate does not mean refusing to acknowledge the finger is broken. Many observations in CRT writings may illuminate needs and shortcomings of which believers ought to be made aware, even if believers ought to reject some or all of the conclusions in those writings.

Second, even if it were true that American culture cannot overcome systemic racism (as CRT contends), there still would be nothing precluding believers from improving their own response to such conditions. That is, Criswell College's premillennial eschatology precludes our belief in achieving any form of utopian existence before Christ returns. It is false that our culture's inability to overcome any flaw—or any evil designed into it—precludes believers from being faithful in their own obedience to Christ here and now. Criswell College should handle CRT as it handles other intellectual and academic resources: not as entirely devoid of value, but with some ideas to be rejected, and others providing insight, whether as a means to greater awareness of facts or a greater sense of empathy for how others see the world.

Gender

Discussions about gender roles inevitably address issues related to feminism. As a movement and ideology, feminism (at least in some forms) arrives at some conclusions which are incompatible with Criswell College's doctrinal commitments. But feminism emerged in response to social issues which were not being sufficiently addressed in their day. Women's suffrage is an example. The college's response to feminism should be the same as its response to other movements (such as CRT above): having some insights to be rejected, and others from which to benefit. The college's commitment to gender diversity is to: "...improving representation of variety among...men and women...." That language communicates two distinct ideas.

First, the college must serve women better. The college's articles of faith specify that while "both men and women are gifted for service in the church, the office of pastor is limited to men...." Having women teach in the classroom, speak in chapel, study for ministry here and abroad, and lead out among students does not impinge on the college's doctrinal commitment that the role of senior pastor is limited to men, but does provide a better educational setting for Criswell women, including better equipping for ministry opportunities after graduation.

Second, the college maintains its biblically rooted understanding of sexuality and marriage, as specified in the institution's Gender and Marriage Policy: "...that humans are normatively and innately male or female, that marriage is to be heterosexual, monogamous, and for a lifetime, and that sexual relationships are to be consummated only in marriage." While those elements are part of a historical tradition in western culture, other traditional elements of culture are not intrinsic to the college's commitment, including some recent movements defining masculinity within narrow historical and cultural boundaries not found in scripture. The purpose for the college is to serve well both the "men and women...gifted for service in the church."

Justice

Since people use social justice with wildly different meanings—ranging from government-imposed redistribution to corporate, oligarchical, or libertarian altruism—those who speak of social justice must clarify its meaning or application. A key element of social justice is equity, one aspect of the college's diversity initiative. Equity expresses itself primarily in caring for the vulnerable or seeking justice for those from whom it has been excluded. The issue is not that only the excluded need equity, but that those who are powerful already have or quickly find representation by their own means—one definition of being powerful. Such an emphasis on social justice is not about tilting the field against the powerful, but providing for the vulnerable what the powerful already have.

In the mid-twentieth century, the social gospel had replaced evangelism in some more liberal churches and denominations. Economic remedies and social programs became the end goal, rather than spiritual conversion and sanctification through discipleship. Today, social justice provides a banner for some who seek economic remedies and advocate for social programs. The correspondence is more than a coincidence, but less than evidence of equivalence.

In response to the social gospel movement, fundamentalists and conservatives reemphasized the centrality and priority of evangelism, a shift still important to Criswell College, indicated in the phrase the college's Articles of Faith adds to the Baptist Faith and Message: "Therefore, the greatest contribution the church can make to social betterment is to bring individual men to a heart changing encounter with Jesus Christ." However, with the necessary move toward evangelism came an unnecessary distrust of economic remedies and social programs not simply as they emerge from the social gospel, but in and of themselves. Criswell College seeks to value both the Great Commission and the Great Commandment, without apologizing or hedging about either. Christian advocacy for social justice errs if it obscures the need for evangelism or disciple-making—precisely what happened when social gospel advocates turned attention entirely away from eternity toward easing earthly suffering. Christian advocacy for evangelism errs if it obscures the need for social justice—precisely what happened when slave-owners encouraged slaves to accept their earthly suffering in exchange for the promise of eternal reward.

Institutional tolerance v alignment

Intellectual freedom and the exchange of a wide range of ideas is an essential ingredient of an institution of higher learning, for the same reason persons with different gifts are important to the church. No one is intellectually sufficient when alone, just as no one is spiritually sufficient when alone. The college's focus on diversity is not a demand for uniformity of opinion. Indeed, it is an invitation to legitimate tolerance of diverse perspectives. What the initiative does require is alignment. Alignment is not about suffocating discussion or disagreement internally, but about communicating and marketing the college's vision and identity with unanimity.
