

Western Theological Seminary Statement on Racial and Ethnic Diversity

Summary

From the very beginning, scripture is clear that all people are created in the image of God without distinction of race or ethnicity (e.g. Gen 1:26-28; Gen 9:6) and that the blessings of God are for all peoples and nations (e.g. Gen 12:1-3, Isa 2:1-4). Above all, we see that for all who are in Christ, there are no grounds for division based on ethnicity or race. Race is a purely cultural construct, although it exerts tremendous power in the world. Our identity in Christ incorporates and celebrates our social identities such as race and ethnicity. We are united to Christ by the Spirit through faith, such that none may boast over another (Gal 3:26-29; Eph 2:11-22; Col 3:11); and yet our one-ness in Christ also includes our distinct racial and ethnic identities, which was God's intentional design and will continue to be affirmed and celebrated into the eschaton (e.g. Rev 7:9-10).

At Western Theological Seminary we long to embody more fully that to which the gospel calls us, and of which our standards remind us, with regard to racial and ethnic diversity. We affirm the biblical practices of peacemaking and racial reconciliation. God calls us to love our neighbors and to be agents of reconciliation in the world.

We are also committed to the biblical practices of justice. We strive to grow in racial reconciliation and justice by embodying the biblical value of mutuality. We desire to facilitate true equality among all our members of various ethnic, gender, and racial backgrounds. We commit to relating to one another with honor, fairness, and respect.

Finally, we affirm in Christ-centered unity-in-diversity. We seek to provide an educational context through which our students will learn to lead and serve in diverse intercultural and international contexts. We strive to become a Christ-centered learning community that is racially and ethnically diverse. We also commit to be a hospitable learning community that provides opportunities for students to learn from and with those who come from different backgrounds.

It is our hope that through these commitments, students will experience formative and transformative experiences that equip them to become more faithful Christians and leaders in this world.

The Rationale

Our Reformed confessional standards remind us that the church cannot be delimited by any particular place or people (Belgic Confession, Article 27); that [all followers of Christ are] called to proclaim the gospel without differentiation or discrimination to all nations and people (Canons of Dort, Second Main Point of Doctrine, Article 5); and that it is the gift and the obligation of the church to embody racial-ethnic unity-in-diversity, rejoicing in the variety of gifts that this brings to the body, and resisting whatever leads towards division along racial-ethnic lines (The Belhar Confession).

As a seminary, we confess our struggle to live into this well, individually and as an institution, and the ways that we have created an environment that has been unwelcoming, frustrating, and discouraging for people who come from outside our predominantly white environment. We confess that we have not done enough to eliminate systems, policies, and practices that have upheld our status quo.

We therefore offer the following summary of what we affirm, what we reject, and what we seek to commit ourselves to, as individuals and as a community. We do this in order that we might live more deeply into this aspect of our calling, as those united to Christ and one another by the Spirit and looking towards the fullness of the coming reign of God.

1) We affirm that all human beings are in the image of God, and we uphold the full dignity and worth of all people of all racial and ethnic identities.

We therefore reject any direct or indirect discrimination against, and devaluing or dishonoring of, any person on the grounds of race or ethnicity.

In the power and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we commit to eliminating all forms of racial prejudice, individually and in our institutional culture.

2) We affirm that God's people are called to be a channel of God's blessing to all nations, and that God's promises and purposes in Christ are for all people without racial or ethnic distinction.

We therefore reject historic and contemporary ways of articulating and embodying the gospel that reinforce notions of white supremacy, and that privilege aspects of one racial or ethnic identity over another.

In the power and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we commit to embodying our identity as a Reformed, evangelical, ecumenical community in ways that are alert to how our predominantly white heritage has shaped us, and we commit to seeking to eliminate ways that this heritage has distorted our presentation of the gospel and our community life.

3) We affirm that in the Old Testament, Jesus' ministry, and in the New Testament church as it is empowered by the Spirit after his ascension, God crosses boundaries and welcomes those

whom the majority culture regards as 'strangers,' such that distinctions remain, but walls of hostility and division are broken down. God, therefore, challenges thrones of unjust privilege such that all might have a chance to flourish.

We therefore reject expressions of Christian community that foster insularity rather than engagement and that uphold privilege that excludes rather than embracing all. We also reject notions of one-ness in Christ that tend towards the assimilation of diverse cultures within the dominant culture.

In the power and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we commit to encouraging people of all races and ethnicities to join the WTS community, and to becoming a more truly hospitable place, such that people of all races and ethnicities feel genuinely welcomed, their distinctive contributions are valued, and their presence has a transforming influence on the community. We commit to fostering a healthy campus climate by providing intentional support to enable the flourishing of those who come to Western from outside the historically white-dominant culture.

4) We affirm that in the fullness of the coming kingdom, multitudes from every race and ethnicity will glorify God together with equal voice.

We therefore reject the marginalizing of non-white voices in the present such that the critical and constructive contributions of people of all races and ethnicities to Christian life, worship, and teaching is side-lined.

In the power and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, we commit to a greater eagerness to hear from, learn with, and share the voices of people of diverse races and ethnicities whose contributions have often been absent from or marginalized in our life and teaching at WTS.

Conclusion

In this, and in all our commitments, we seek to glorify the Triune God, at Western Theological Seminary, in our churches and ministries, and in the wider world, in ways that more closely approximate the communion with the Triune God and one another that we will share in the life to come.