



IF YOU DON'T THINK RACISM EXISTS, YOU'RE WHITE.

CENSORED

CTS Advocates Love Speech over Hate Speech on Facebook

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Topics on racism and white privilege play a major role in national discussions these days. Chicago Theological Seminary shared its stance against racism by posting a meme on Facebook that read: "If you don't think racism exists, you're white." The post touched a nerve with CTS Facebook followers and accumulated thousands of views and shares, generating lively discussions. The dialogue came to a temporary halt when Facebook took down the image, claiming it violated Facebook Community Standards. The response from CTS was swift, with President Alice Hunt writing an article for The Huffington Post. Facebook subsequently reposted the meme. She wrote:

On August 18th, Chicago Theological Seminary posted

If you don't think racism exists, you're white.

on social media. After two weeks of wide engagement, the statistics were amazing. Over 200,000 people were reached. Over 16,000 people engaged with this internet post (meme) with either likes, comments, or sharing.

Last week, Facebook removed the post (meme) saying we had violated "Facebook Community Standards."

The post did what we wanted it to do. We wanted to make people think; we wanted to get people talking about difficult and important matters facing our society; and we wanted to take a stand on a crucial justice issue. And yet the post was removed. While we cannot know exactly why the meme was removed, we can only guess,

after a review of the Facebook Community Standards, that Facebook considered the meme to fall under their "Hate Speech" standard where they say, "Facebook removes hate speech, which includes content that directly attacks people based on their race, ethnicity..."

Should we then assume that some people complained to Facebook that our meme was hate speech against White people? I can tell you, as the seminary's President, that is just not the case. Yes, people may have been challenged by our post, and even felt angry and offended. But the primary offense is racism itself, not calling direction attention to racism.

Our stand against racism is exactly what theologian Dr. Beverly Harrison meant when she pointed to "the power of anger in the work of love." As people of faith, we must love enough to get angry at great injustice and call it out.

Our Facebook meme pointed directly to the fact that racism exists and is a fact, anecdotally and scientifically. Most people, even Fox News commentator, Bill O'Reilly admit that racism exists. Persons of color, subject to racism every day, know this all too well. They live it...they never need reminding that racism exists. (Another way to have created this meme would have been to say--If you

are Black, you already know racism exists.) Therefore, the only person/people who could possibly be explicitly unaware of the existence of racism are the ones who do not experience its oppressive effects--white people.

Those who are offended by the post are likely reading it incorrectly. We are not saying that all White people are racists. We are saying White Americans need to work harder to see racism. We are not saying that if you are White, you are a racist. We are saying White racism is a problem that needs to be highlighted. We are not saying that if you are Black, you cannot be a racist. We are merely making the point that persons of color know all too well the effects of racism.

Racism is a hot topic of conversation in our country right now. That is a good thing - although not an easy conversation - it is a crucial conversation. The BlackLivesMatter movement is central to today's conversations because it focuses on the specifics of race and violence. AllLivesMatter can sound like a good value, but it takes attention away from the specific and thus dilutes the concern for what is happening now, and to whom, and why.

'How do black lives matter?' is also an important question. Black lives mattered during slavery because they were counted as wealth and status. Black lives mattered post-reconstruction as a source of exploited labor. Black lives have matter today as a profit-center for private prisons. But that is not what our faith tradition teaches is the reason black lives should matter.

We are all created in the image of God. Genesis 1:26 has God saying, "Let us create humankind in our own image." All of us being created in the image of God does not mean only the men or only the white people or only the straight people or only the rich people. All means all. We are all created in the image of God.

This conversation must go forward. As a white person, I and other white Americans who are concerned about equal justice in our society need to make sure we are valuing black lives as much as we are valuing our own.

As an educator, I feel called to teach about these issues. African Americans are American citizens who are coming under fire. This cannot, in all conscience, be allowed to continue. White Americans must bear witness to the deaths and desecration of black lives.

As a religious leader, I feel called to teach and preach about these issues. People of faith, we need a new kind of prayer. Our prayer must be action. Here are three things: we must learn to 1) recognize how our white privilege pervades our culture; we must 2) name white privilege every time we see it; and we must 3) confront ourselves in the mirror and examine, accept and correct what we do on every front. Our prayer at this time must be action.

At Chicago Theological Seminary, we strive to love justice so much that we are willing to call out injustice and take a stand. We will not be deterred by Facebook taking down our meme, and we will post on white privilege and racial justice again. That's a promise and our prayer in action.