

Review: Rediscipling the White Church

June 30, 2020

Rediscipling the White Church: From Cheap Diversity to True Solidarity

By David W. Swanson (InterVarsity Press)

“What do we do?”

As a white church leader of a majority-white church, this is a question I have heard and asked repeatedly over the last several weeks. It’s also a question my friends of color tell me they are hearing often from well-meaning white folks who are eager to be helpful but feeling ill-equipped.

Discussions of racial injustice are taking place all over our nation. Church leaders must seek a path towards real racial reconciliation within the church. We all are asking, “What do we do?”



Rediscipling the White Church: From Cheap Diversity to True Solidarity is a

timely book that not only educates readers on the reality of the influence of white supremacy in American culture and churches, but also charts a path forward for leaders in their local contexts.

David W. Swanson, a white pastor of a multicultural congregation in Chicago, argues that “before white churches pursue racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity as the solution to our segregation, we must first address the discipleship that led to our segregation in the first place.”

Swanson builds on the work of James K. A. Smith—author of *Desiring the Kingdom* and *You Are What You Love*—which observes how people are motivated most powerfully, not by their knowledge, but by their desires and loves. These desires and loves are shaped by the habits we build.

“Christian worship,” Smith writes, “functions as a counter-formation to the mis-formation of secular liturgies into which we are ‘thrown’ from any early age.”

Most white Christians likely would agree the liturgies of consumption in the shopping mall or the liturgy of vanity we practice on Instagram has mis-formed us. The mis-formation Swanson guides his readers to be counter-formed against is the mis-formation of white supremacy and racist biases.

After providing a crash course in the history of racial injustice, white supremacy and his own unconscious bias, Swanson invites us to be re-disciplined. He writes, “In the spiritual battle for a more reconciled church, every single majority-white congregation has a significant role to play, and it begins with discipleship.”

To help us in the counter-formation, Swanson provides practical guidance on practices church leaders can begin to introduce to their congregation to counter-form our cultural discipleship. A few of the practices he suggests are kingdom preaching, children’s ministry of reconciliation, salvation from superiority and uncommon friendship. These discipleship activities speak to

the formation of the entire church family. It was refreshing to read a pastor grappling with the need to address race honestly with our children in church.

Throughout the work, Swanson fills his pages with references and notes from authors of color whose voices deserve to be amplified and shared. He also includes a helpful book list for further reading.

Swanson models his own answer to the “what do we do” question. He uses his voice and platform to address his white brothers and sisters in Christ. As he does, he exposes them to voices of people of color who they may not have listened to before. Our habits and desires begin to be reshaped as we practice listening to people like Austin Channing Brown, Drew G. I. Hart, Ida B. Wells and James Baldwin.

Rediscovering the White Church serves as an excellent primer on racial reconciliation in the church, and Swanson’s focus on discipleship is unique and profound.

As a white pastor in a majority-white church, Swanson’s book provided me with insight and strategies to move toward a new way of disciple-making that takes the cultural discipling of white supremacy seriously. It is both helpful and convicting.

*Evan Duncan, teaching and communications pastor
First Baptist Church, Temple*