



Disunity in Christ: Uncovering the Hidden Forces that Keep Us Apart

By Christena Cleveland

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Winner of a 2013 *Leadership Journal* Book Award ("Our Very Short List" in "The Leader's Outer Life" category) 2014 Readers' Choice Awards Honorable Mention Despite Jesus' prayer that all Christians "be one," divisions have been epidemic in the body of Christ from the beginning to the present. We cluster in theological groups, gender groups, age groups, ethnic groups, educational and economic groups. We criticize freely those who disagree with us, don't look like us, don't act like us and don't even like what we like. Though we may think we know why this happens, Christena Cleveland says we probably don't. In this eye-opening book, learn the hidden reasons behind conflict and divisions. Learn:

- Why I think all my friends are unique but those in other groups are all the same
- Why little differences often become big sources of conflict
- Why categorizing others is often automatic and helpful but can also have sinister side effects
- Why we are so often victims of groupthink and how we can avoid it
- Why women think men are judging them more negatively than men actually are, and vice versa
- Why choices of language can actually affect unity

With a personal touch and the trained eye of a social psychologist, Cleveland brings to bear the latest studies and research on the unseen dynamics at work that tend to separate us from others. Learn why Christians who have a heart for unity have such a hard time actually uniting. The author provides real insight for ministry leaders who have attempted to build bridges across boundaries. Here are the tools we need to understand how we can overcome the hidden forces that divide us.

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Disunity in Christ: Uncovering the Hidden Forces that Keep Us Apart By Christena Cleveland **Bibliography**

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Editorial Review

Review

"A well-researched and readable book on the issue of disunity that all of us pastors face but are able to do little about once the wheels are set in motion. Helped to remind me of the importance of dealing with potential problems before they blossom into something more sinister." (Dave McDowell, "The 2014 Leadership Book Awards," *Leadership Journal*, Winter 2014)

"Cleveland wants us to engage in building bridges and dismantling the existing divisions as soon as we put the book down. In the closing chapters she equips the reader with tools for the work of reconciliation. She provides us with a biblical foundation for cross-cultural unity and explains how to overcome our cognitive and emotional biases. . . . *Disunity in Christ* is not only a source of education, but is also a source of hope that the work of reconciliation is possible, necessary and not done in vain." (Ryan Herring, *Sojourners*, July 2014)

"Cleveland tackles a thorny topic by sharing pieces of her own story. She is appropriately vulnerable and honest about the ways she has sought to grow in her view of other Christians with whom she disagrees. This is a great resource for the pastor or lay leader serious about bridge building in a Christian culture that can sometimes be obsessed with fortifying boundaries and walls." (Andrew E. Stoddard, *Leadership Journal*, Winter 2014)

"What I love about Christena's work is that it is consistently thoughtful, gracious, and PRACTICAL. Few writers are able to instruct without condescending, question without growing cynical, and challenge without hurting. I am so grateful for Christena's wise perspective." (Rachel Held Evans, July 23, 2013, www.rachelheldevans.com/blog)

"In *Disunity in Christ*, Christena Cleveland keenly points out why Christians who have a heart for unity have such a hard time actually uniting, and offers wisdom on how we might begin to listen to and work with others who differ from us." (Chris Smith, *Relevant Magazine*, "10 Books to Read This Fall for a Deeper Faith," September 12, 2014)

"Christena Cleveland provides valuable insight into the causes and perpetuation of factors within the body of Jesus Christ that hinder true unity. She examines how obstacles such as race, national origin and personal prejudices can only be overcome when believers are willing to break outside the boundaries of their small cultural/group identities and embrace the larger common identity. Worship leaders will be challenged to encourage worship that merges a diverse congregation into a unified body praising God." (Jeff Friend, *Worship Leader Magazine*, May/June 2014)

"*Disunity in Christ* gives us an opportunity to begin a dialogue in the church that is way overdue. If we can talk about privilege and race and divide, if we can get it on our collective radar, then, like the new word, it'll start appearing all over the place. And at that point we can make different choices, better choices. . . . If she continues to hone in on her singular perspective and keeps speaking with courage and truth, then Christena Cleveland's voice will continue to be very welcome indeed." (Zena Neds-Fox, *Englewood Review of Books*, Advent 2013)

"Amidst American culture, in which deep divides over race and sexuality have been driving public

conversation in recent years, it is a great work of peacemaking to have a book like this that reflects on why our differences lead to conflict and divisions, and how we can begin to work toward healing." (C. Christopher Smith, Englewood Review of Books, Ordinary Time 2013)

"With a personal touch and the trained eye of a social psychologist, Cleveland brings to bear the latest studies and research on the unseen dynamics at work that tend to separate us from others. Learn why Christians who have a heart for unity have such a hard time actually uniting. The author provides real insight for ministry leaders who have attempted to build bridges across boundaries." (Light Magazine, Canada, November 2013)

"In *Disunity in Christ* 5/5 stars, Cleveland helps readers view people of diverse cultural backgrounds as God's gifts, not thorns in the flesh. She provides valuable insights, practical recommendations, and tools to help the Christian community identify and address the dynamics that fracture Christ's body. . . . My hope, ultimately, is that *Disunity in Christ* will create new momentum toward fulfilling Jesus' prayer for unity amongst his followers. Those involved in building and supporting multiethnic Christian communities will be moved by Cleveland's stories, perspectives, and gracious spirit. Her book will, I hope, help us resolve generational, economic, political, and theological differences?and teach us to see that, truly, we are better off together." (Paul Louis Metzger, Christianity Today, November 2013)

"*Disunity in Christ* is an honest and sophisticated account of the disunity within the Christian community. Highlighting social-psychological principles backed by a large body of scientific research, Cleveland both explains why human nature allows--perhaps even facilitates--this disunity, and outlines steps for overcoming it. The book is unapologetically hopeful and insightful. It emphasizes Christ's underlying message of unity in a down-to-earth, heartwarming and easily accessible way. Readers can experience a sense of fellowship with the author as they relate to her experiences. The refreshing insights within each chapter and the thought-provoking questions at the end of each chapter make this book an excellent discussion starter and a wonderful teaching tool." (Carmel Saad, assistant professor of psychology, Westmont College)

"Weaving together research from social psychology with engaging--and sometimes hilarious!--stories from her own life, Christena Cleveland has given us a unique and important work on a matter of extreme importance. Written with a clarity and style that is accessible to all, this marvelous book is as informative as it is practical, as challenging as it is entertaining, and as insightful as it is fun (yes, a book on reconciliation that is *fun*!). Every Christian concerned about reconciliation in the church--and all Christians *should* be--will benefit from reading *Disunity in Christ*." (Greg Boyd, senior pastor, Woodland Hills Church, Maplewood, Minnesota)

"An ideal tool for ministry leaders, this book answers such questions as why choices in language can affect unity, how we can avoid thinking as a group, and why women think men perceive them negatively." (CBA Retailers + Resources, December 2013)

"'Witty, thought-provoking, engaging and delightful-to-read book' best characterizes this well-informed analysis of major divisions that fracture churches within contemporary America. Christena Cleveland's ability to weave autobiography, sociology and social psychology into her fine analysis of the topic offers stunning insight into congregational life today. May serious Christians enter the conversation that she has graciously framed." (David D. Daniels, Henry Winters Luce Professor of World Christianity, McCormick Theological Seminary, Chicago)

"If you are concerned about healing the schisms within Christianity--or for that matter, between Christians and non-Christians--this is the book for you. Clearheaded, well written and funny, it is a serious attempt to

do something important." (T. M. Luhrmann, Stanford University, author of *When God Talks Back*)

"Christena Cleveland's book is delightful, witty and deeply insightful! She effortlessly weaves her own voice and stories with compelling social psychological research to convey an urgent, informed message that church leaders, educators and lay Christians will find profoundly useful." (Christine Ma-Kellams, college fellow, department of psychology, Harvard University)

"In *Disunity in Christ*, Christena Cleveland provides an insightful analysis of why we all say we want unity but find it so difficult to gain it. Combining a humble Christian tone, familiarity with many types of churches and skillful use of social science, *Disunity in Christ* reveals to us those very human tendencies that keep us divided. Along the way, Cleveland helps us to see, laugh at and rethink our very selves. This book will effectively help any Christian or church wanting a deeper experience of the reconciliation we have in the body of Christ. As a pastor serving a church of some thirty nationalities, I found it an extremely useful analysis of what hurts and helps unity." (Thabiti M. Anyabwile, senior pastor, First Baptist Church of Grand Cayman, and author of *The Decline of African American Theology*)

"A unique, down-to-earth but delightful and fast-moving confession about a thoughtful and fun trip through the vicissitudes of personal experience and growth in the meaning of Christianity." (James J. Blascovich, professor of psychology, University of California Santa Barbara)

"In this wise and approachable book, Christena Cleveland brings a fresh perspective on the importance of doing our own 'perspective taking' to uncover blind spots, identify internalized fears and expose privileged assumptions within the body of Christ that keep us caught in uniformity and division, rather than celebrating our unity and diversity in the image of the triune God. With humor, grace and solid research, Cleveland encourages the church toward practical, theological renewal by dismantling cultural categories and false boundaries in order to undertake the risky, exhilarating, cruciform work of crosscultural reconciliation. She does not consider this to be an optional idea. Rather, Cleveland rightly assumes that multiethnic, crosscultural reconciliation manifests the church's glorious, nonnegotiable life in the kingdom of God, and she leaves us better equipped to enact that life together." (Cherith Fee Nordling, associate professor of theology, Northern Seminary)

"*Disunity in Christ* is a very significant book for twenty-first-century Christians and congregations. Using accessible language and concepts, Christena Cleveland offers profound insights from social psychology to clarify the many reasons for the troubling and rampant divisions found in Christianity. She also suggests very practical strategies for creating greater unity. This book is a must-read for pastors, lay leaders, seminarians and college students. The integrity of Christianity depends on a church not only committed to reconciliation but moving toward real unity. Cleveland unveils a clear, compelling and realistic path to get us there." (Curtiss Paul DeYoung, professor of reconciliation studies, Bethel University)

"Cleveland is a smart, funny, social scientist who speaks to the church's fundamental problems with listening. Pointing out how segregated we have become (ethnically, to be sure, but also theologically and culturally), she remarks on how puzzling it is that people committed to unity have such a hard time actually *uniting*. A key, for Cleveland, is acknowledging that bias feels good, and actively trying to overcome it. She also tackles our cultural idolatry of individualism and points out that, whether in churches or neighborhoods, homogeneity is never harmless." (D. L. Mayfield, *Christianity Today*, September 2015)

"This book is a helpful tool for reflection over what are really our blind spots which become great tragedies leading to numerous divisions amongst Christians. This is not a theological tome on Christian unity?rather a Christian psychologist's analysis and resource to help deal with a common problem." (Haddington House

Journal, 2016)

About the Author

Christena Cleveland (PhD, University of California, Santa Barbara) is associate professor of reconciliation studies at Bethel University in St. Paul, Minnesota. She is an award-winning researcher and gifted teacher who brings organizational experience to her efforts to build unity. She consults with pastors and organizational leaders on multicultural issues and speaks regularly at organizations, churches, conferences, universities and schools.

Users Review

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James McDonald:

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