

A Biblical Analysis of Critical Race Theory

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Prior to its mention by President Trump in the first presidential debate of 2020, many Americans were unfamiliar with the term “Critical Race Theory.” However, the past decade has seen various terms from Critical Race Theory (CRT) make their way into the popular consciousness, such as “systemic racism,” “white privilege,” “1619 Project,” “woke,” among others. Discussions around the killings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown (and others), often utilize language and terminology from CRT, whether the average person is aware of it or not.

Though CRT—or, at least, language borrowed from CRT—has become ubiquitous in our conversations surrounding race, many Christians have neither analyzed the key tenets of CRT nor considered these tenets in light of a Christian worldview. A potential danger for Christians is what one scholar calls “hermit crab integration.” “Hermit crab theology” as Thaddeus Williams describes it, “takes Jesus and jams him inside the preexisting shell of some extrabiblical ideology.”¹ The problem with this model is that we cannot utilize a structure that is antithetical to the Christian worldview

and try to “make” it Christian. The Christian message would get distorted and shaped by this competing worldview, so that it is no longer Christian. The question Christians must ask is, are we at risk of falling into “hermit crab theology” in relation to CRT? Are we taking the “shell” an ideology or system that is antithetical to the Christian worldview and trying to force a Christian paradigm within that framework?

The very act of questioning CRT usually comes along with accusations of racism or claims that those who oppose it are against justice. However, we must not resort to ad hominem attacks, but rather seek to understand a view and rightly compare and contrast it with the teaching of Scripture and Christian theology. When we consider the concept of “justice,” we can clearly see that a critique of CRT does not necessitate opposition to justice. Williams rightly states, “No one is pro-injustice ... the problem is not with the quest for social justice. The problem is what happens when that quest is undertaken from a framework that is not compatible with the Bible.”²

The question remains: Why write about CRT? After all, there are many issues in our society, why focus on this one? As Christians we are to discern the various worldviews and philosophies in the world to make sure that they do not lead us away from Jesus. Paul warns the Colossians not to be taken “captive through philosophy and empty deception, which are based on human tradition and the spiritual forces of the world rather than on Christ” (Col 2:8). When an ideology becomes so pervasive that it causes division among Christians, we must carefully scrutinize it, both charitably and accurately.

It is my contention that CRT is like the philosophies based on human tradition that Paul refers to. In the remainder of this article, I will show that CRT is a competing worldview that is antithetical to the Christian worldview. Because I contend CRT is a competing worldview, I will analyze it through a lens sometimes used to examine worldviews: epistemology (view of truth), anthropology (view of humanity), hamartiology (view of sin or what is wrong with humanity), soteriology (how to fix what is wrong or save people), and cosmology (view of origins) showing how it differs from what the Bible teaches about these areas. Prior to analyzing these areas, I will give the definition and origins of CRT to better understand how we have arrived at this cultural moment in the West. Throughout this article, I will quote from CRT proponents to avoid caricatures of their position and to show that what I claim about their views is, in fact, accurate.³

I have three primary purposes for this article. First, I will argue that CRT is, in fact, a worldview, whether it regards itself as such or not. It is often referred to as an analytic “tool,” useful for studying systems of power related to race, but CRT is, in fact, a worldview because it contains all the characteristics of a worldview and makes claims in all categories that comprise a worldview. Second, though I think it is a competing worldview, it can still be informative in certain regards. In a fallen world, very few ideas are wrong in their entirety (though some are). CRT offers an explanation for oppression and racism in our society, and, while I find most of it epistemologically lacking, it still has some ideas from which we can learn, as long as we locate these explanations within Christian theology and not the worldview tenets of CRT. Thus, I will highlight what CRT correctly identifies about our world according to the standard of Scripture. Finally, I will offer a critique of CRT and propose how it differs from a biblical worldview. In elucidating these final two points, I hope to follow Anthony Bradley’s advice when he writes,

CRT is merely one account of how racism has operated in American society. One can (and should) learn what one can from it while rejecting what is wrong. CRT is an attempt to give an account of the historic phenomena of racism in America and the vestiges of how racism may linger in how we treat our neighbors and how institutions may operate today. But it is not an account we must accept or reject wholesale. This is an essential point as many progressives today treat CRT as a complete doctrine that must be applied through every level of society while conservatives react against this and reject CRT in its entirety. Both approaches are wrong-headed and simplistic.⁴

ORIGINS AND DEFINITION OF CRT

Before detailing the key tenets, it is important to ask two questions: How do we define CRT and where did it come from? It is to this latter question that I will turn to first.

Many contend that CRT is simply an adapted form of Critical Theory (CT) where the former focuses on racial oppression rather than the latter’s focus on economic oppression. However, the evolution from CT to CRT is not quite so straightforward. In the following paragraphs, we will see that CRT is actually an amalgamation of CT and postmodern philosophy, along

with various strands of legal studies, which looked to make new gains after the Civil Rights Act was passed in the 1960's.⁵

CT emerged out of Germany from a group of philosophers and social theorists in the Marxist tradition who came to be known as the “Frankfurt School.” In its early formation, CT focused primarily on economics as one might expect from a theory deriving from Marxism.⁶ CT had several aims. In general, it aimed at “decreasing domination and increasing freedom.”⁷ Specifically, it analyzed why Marxism was not as successful in Western countries as it was in Eastern Europe and South America (post-World War II). Though it developed out of Marxism, these theorists criticized Marx’s exclusive focus on economic domination, and expanded his views to analyze power, alienation, and exploitation beyond the economic sphere.⁸ Moreover, Critical theorists opposed traditional theory, liberalism, and the Enlightenment. Traditional theory explained facts through universal laws and generally thought scientific truths should have empirical confirmation. Traditional theory postulated an objective world and thought that knowledge was a mirror of reality.⁹ CT rejected the notion of objectivity in knowledge and saw knowledge as constrained by the historical location of the “knower.” As Max Horkheimer states, “The facts which our senses present to us are socially preformed in two ways: through the historical character of the object perceived and through the historical character of the perceiving organ.”¹⁰ In line with Marx’s larger utopian vision of society, the Frankfurt School sought to describe how a given area under examination failed to live up to that vision of society, and it prescribed ways to remake society in accordance with their vision.¹¹

Why is it called *Critical* Theory? What is “critical” about it? These theorists followed along with Marx’s insistence that everything be subject to criticism with the goal of changing society.¹² In order to analyze the lack of success of Marxism in the Western context, Antonio Gramsci examined the dominance of capitalist ideas over other ideas and how these capitalist ideas used cultural institutions to marginalize other systems and maintain their dominance.¹³ He called this concept “cultural hegemony,” which refers to the fact that the ruling class does not maintain their worldview through violent oppression. Rather, the dominant class conditions society to their ideology through all cultural institutions, so hegemony is established through conditioning rather than force. Gramsci primarily wrote to understand how Western societies preserved their capitalist ideologies, but his concept of cultural hegemony

would be utilized by later postmodernists and, eventually, critical race theorists to explain patterns of race relations.

There are some connections between CT and postmodernism which eventually coalesce into CRT, so we will turn our attention to postmodern philosophy. Postmodernism began to gain cultural prominence in the 1960s, led primarily by a group of French philosophers. The details of its origins go beyond the scope of this article, but from its inception, it rejected modernism, particularly its focus on “unifying narratives, universalism, and progress, achieved primarily through scientific knowledge and technology.”¹⁴ Postmodernism argued against metanarratives (overarching explanations of truth or a theory that attempts to give a comprehensive account of events, experiences, or cultural phenomena), primarily because it saw knowledge as culturally constructed.¹⁵ Postmodernism was much less interested in Marxism—in fact, postmodernism explicitly rejected Marx’s metanarrative about economic class struggle—but it adopted the critical mood of the Frankfurt School even though it did not directly derive from the Frankfurt School.¹⁶ CT spoke of hegemonic (controlling or dominant) power structures—though related to capitalism—which postmodernism adapted and argued that these hegemonic structures were not simply related to capitalism, but hegemonic structures exist across all facets of difference and must be exposed and overturned.

Postmodern Principle #1: Rejection of Objective Truth

The most concise way to analyze postmodernism is to divide it into two principles and four themes.¹⁷ The first principle of postmodernism is skepticism about objective knowledge or truth. Postmodernism rejects the fact that there are objective truths, and that those truths can be established by their correspondence with how things actually are in the world (the correspondence theory of truth).¹⁸ Michel Foucault, one of the main postmodern theorists, argued that reality and truth exist, but he doubted that humans have the ability to transcend our cultural biases to obtain it.¹⁹ For Foucault, sociopolitical power determines what is “true” because dominant discourse (the way we talk about things) determines what is true in a given culture at a given time.²⁰ Thus, one of the main principles of postmodernity is that knowledge is culturally (or socially) constructed and, thus, culturally relative.²¹

Postmodern Principle #2: Systems of Power

The second principle is that societies, at their root, are made up of systems of power and hierarchies which determine what can be known and how it can be known. This principle flows out of the previous principle. If knowledge is culturally constructed, then it follows that internal systems determine what can be known. For postmodern theory, it is power that decides both what is factually correct and morally good.²² Like Critical Theorists, postmodernists hypothesize that the powerful have organized society to benefit them and perpetuate their power. Critical Theorists, however, see the powerful as the economically wealthy class who organizes society while postmodernists are less clear on their assertions as to whom the “powerful” specifically are.²³ The way the powerful maintain power is through “rules” (often unspoken) about how people are permitted to speak about things. These “rules” occur in routine interactions, expectations, and social conditions, and happen subtly.²⁴ Therefore, an institution can be oppressive without any individual within that institution expressing explicitly oppressive views. Every institution in a society perpetuates power, so by mere participation in an institution, a person promotes (implicitly or explicitly) the oppressive structure that has developed. This postmodern idea of how power is perpetuated in a society borrows both from Gramsci as well as Foucault. Gramsci postulated that cultural hegemony perpetuates power through the routine interactions that are conditioned into people while Foucault saw that certain discourses dominate, which promotes power in society. Thus, this principle of postmodernism combines Gramsci and Foucault’s theories on cultural hegemony and dominant discourses, respectively.

As a consequence of the theories of Foucault and Gramsci, it is impossible for someone wishing to challenge the dominant system to do so from within the system. The demand for evidence of oppression is viewed by postmodernists as a request to participate within a system of discourse that was built by the powerful and, thus, designed to maintain their power and continue oppression because these systems exclude other means of producing “knowledge.”²⁵ By even participating in the demand for evidence, it means that the “oppressors” win because participation in the evidentiary process is a system that the oppressors designed to further oppression. This principle can be confusing because we take for granted many of the ways we know or prove our knowledge.²⁶

Postmodern Theme #1: Loss of the Individual

In addition to the two foundational principles, there are also 4 major themes found in postmodernism that are a result of the two principles: (1) the loss of the individual, (2) moral relativity, (3) the blurring of boundaries, and (4) the power of language.

The first theme is *the loss of the individual and the universal*. In contrast to the Enlightenment and modernity, postmodernism does not prize the individual above all else. Modernity understood society to be based around individuals who interact with universal reality in unique ways, so there is one reality but many experiences of that reality. Instead, postmodernism sees groups of people who have shared identity markers as the fundamental basis of society. The focus of postmodernism is on smaller or local narratives and the lived experience of these groups. These groups then produce knowledge, values, and discourse. We can see the connection with Foucault who sees knowledge as culturally contained—the focus on groups localizes knowledge by understanding smaller groups of people with similar identity markers as the cultures that each constructs knowledge.

Postmodern Theme #2: Moral Relativity

A second theme is that of *moral relativity*. Morality is not found in any universal principles or religious traditions, but it is made, created by dialogue (discourses) and choice.²⁷ All knowledge is culturally constructed, and morality is the same. Different descriptions of reality cannot be measured against one another because knowledge, truth, and meaning are culturally constructed. Since truth is culturally constructed by dominant discourses, we are unable to transcend our cultural boundaries to examine other ways of knowing or morality.

Postmodern Theme #3: Blurring of Boundaries

The third theme is the *blurring of boundaries*, which means that postmodernists are suspicious of any categories that were widely accepted as true. Which boundaries are blurred? Basically all boundaries are blurred—the boundary between objective and subjective, sciences and the arts, man and other animals, gender, and nearly every socially significant category. From this pillar much of the transgender movement arises, including the idea that men and women are exactly the same and that any differences between them are mere cultural constructions.

Postmodern Theme #4: Power of Language

The final theme, and perhaps one of the most important, is the *power of language*. Jacques Derrida developed the idea that language creates reality. Language does not represent reality since it is unreliable and must be deconstructed (or torn down). Therefore, language does not describe reality but constructs it. Authorial intention of a text was deconstructed by Derrida through this principle because the speaker's meaning has no more authority than the hearer's interpretation, so intention cannot outweigh impact.²⁸ The need for "safe spaces" on school campuses and the slogan "language is violence" derives directly from this idea. If the impact outweighs the intention, then it does not matter whether a person intended to say something offensive, if someone interprets the statement as sexist or racist, then the impact takes priority.

These principles and themes can be summarized by the twin ideas of the subjectivity of knowledge and morality and how language has the power to create reality and maintain systems of power in a given context. There are, of course, more nuances, but those two ideas broadly characterize postmodernism.

Postmodernism's Rise

Upon its initial introduction into the broader Western culture in the 1960s and 1970s, postmodernism did not gain many adherents, primarily because of its intensely pessimistic outlook. It sought to dismantle all structures and was too pessimistic for anything productive to happen. Thus, a fusion of CT and postmodernism occurred shortly after the Civil Rights era. Much of the reason for this fusion was practical, not theoretical. After the 1960's, racial and sexual discrimination became illegal in the workplace. The main barrier at this point to social equality in the United States was prejudicial attitudes, assumptions, and language—not concrete, discriminatory actions as had been the case prior to the 1960's. These attitudes and language were (and are) less tangible to deal with, but postmodern theory was readily able to address attitudes and language because of its focus on power and privilege perpetuated through discourses.²⁹ CT's focus on power, alienation, cultural hegemony, and its desire to remake society—though from an economic perspective—found a partner in postmodernism which had definitive ideas on the means to remake society—namely, through the deconstructing of discourses, desire to overthrow the modernist views on objective truth and universal morals, and blurring of boundaries.

The fusion of CT and postmodernism turned into “applied postmodernism,” which took some of the ideas of CT and incorporated them into postmodernism with the desire to make actual societal change, rather than merely write and banter about deconstructing society as postmodernists had previously done. The fusion of these two schools of thought moved away from the class warfare language to focus more on power from a racial, gender, and sexual orientation lens. Ironically, postmodernism criticized objective knowledge and metanarratives but views power and oppression on the basis of identity as objectively true and an overarching explanation of society (i.e., a metanarrative).³⁰

Critical Race Theory and Legal Studies

Concurrently, Derrick Bell, in the field of legal studies, became pessimistic about the gains of the Civil Rights legislation and began writing about race relations in America. The fusion of CT and postmodernism spawned numerous other fields of study (or morphed other fields) over the ensuing decades, one of which combined with Bell’s work and became known as CRT. CRT “is an intellectual movement that seeks to understand how white supremacy as a legal, cultural, and political condition is reproduced and maintained, primarily in the US context.”³¹ Critical race theorists “attempt to understand how victims of systemic racism are affected by cultural perceptions of race and how they are able to represent themselves to counter prejudice.”³² Thus, critical race theorists attempt to find and confront systemic racism and identify how victims of systemic racism can counter prejudice. It began first in the legal field but eventually became a broader movement (and metanarrative) concerning race and systemic racism in America.

CRT utilizes the essential features of postmodernism and CT. It is called “critical” because it seeks to identify and expose problems in institutions (and society at large) in order to institute revolutionary political change.³³ It contends that all unequal outcomes in wealth, education, healthcare, and others are due to unjust social structures and systems that preserve racism.³⁴ It never attributes any disparities to individual actions, differences in culture, or human abilities. Rather, whites control the dominant power structures in the USA, so unequal outcomes for minorities (specifically among blacks) reveal the systemic racism that exists in the USA.

Two concepts undergird much of CRT’s views. The first is *standpoint*

theory (also called standpoint epistemology), which is the idea that one's identity and position in society influence how he or she obtains knowledge.³⁵ Standpoint theory from a CRT perspective says that those who are oppressed have better access to knowledge and truth than those who are oppressors (more on this below).

The second concept is *intersectionality*. Intersectionality looks for power imbalances and biases that it assumes are present in every interaction. Intersectionality identifies various characteristics which combine to cause oppression in unique ways. Intersectionality identifies (implicitly or explicitly) a "hierarchy of oppression" on the basis of skin color, gender, and gender identity. For example, being black makes a person part of the oppressed class. However, being a black male means that this person is less oppressed than a black female (since a female is more oppressed than a male). Intersectionality, then, does not simply look at a single characteristic, but argues that a combination of characteristics (or "intersections" of characteristics) can lead to additional oppression that is overlooked when looking at characteristics individually.

CRT then utilizes the postmodern principle of systems of power and hierarchies as foundational to society and provides a variant on the principle about culturally relative knowledge in that it sees knowledge as positional (not necessarily cultural). It further incorporates the postmodern themes of cultural relativism, the loss of the individual, and the power of language. The charge often leveled at CRT by its opponents is that it is simply Marxism. Richard Delgado dismisses this claim, contending that CRT originated out of the Civil Rights Era and borrowed language and theory from critical legal studies and radical feminism.³⁶ While Delgado's claims of the origins of CRT are partly accurate, they do not fully convey the origins of this field of study. As with any theory, CRT has morphed beyond its origin in legal studies and now functions as a metanarrative on how systemic racism exists in the USA. To claim that CRT only exists in legal studies understates how much it has been shaped by CT and postmodernism. In fact, even the definition of CRT—namely, that it analyzes how white supremacy as a cultural condition is reproduced and maintained in society—has concepts that are adopted from Gramsci's ideas of cultural hegemony. Furthermore, charging CRT as Marxist also misses the influence of postmodernism on the field as well. It is much more influenced by postmodernism and the Frankfurt School than

traditional Marxism, so the label as “neo-Marxist” is more accurate, though it too fails to convey the foundational influence of postmodernism.³⁷ Without postmodernism, it is unlikely that CRT would have emerged as a field of study in the late 20th century.

While this explanation about the origins of CRT was lengthy, it is instructive to see how it has developed because most people have only become aware of it in the last decade. As we have seen, however, CRT actually has a complex history and origins that are over 60 years old. More, of course, could be said about CRT, but the above origins and definition gives a broad foundation as we turn our attention to the specifics of the theory.

TENETS OF CRT

In order to better understand CRT and argue that it presents a competing worldview to the Christian one, I will analyze it utilizing typical worldview categories: truth (epistemology), humanity (anthropology), the problem or sin (hamartiology), salvation (soteriology), and creation (cosmology). By viewing CRT within this framework, it becomes obvious that to fully endorse and support CRT is to champion a worldview antithetical to the biblical worldview.

Truth (Epistemology)

“From critical legal studies, [CRT] borrowed the idea of legal indeterminacy—the idea that not every legal case has one correct outcome. Instead, one can decide most cases either way, by emphasizing one line of authority over another or interpreting one fact different from the way one’s adversary does” – Delgado and Stefancic³⁸

“There is no single true, or all encompassing, description. We participate in creating what we see in the very act of describing it. Social and moral realities, the subject of this chapter, are just as indeterminate and subject to interpretation as single objects or events, if no more so.” – Richard Delgado³⁹

“To live with equality in a diverse, pluralistic society, we have to accept the fact that all groups and individuals have a legitimate claim to what is true and real for them.” – Cooper Thompson⁴⁰

Within CRT, there are two primary claims about truth, which can be contradictory. First, *there is no objective reality or truth*. Second, *experience by oppressed groups is prized* because they are deemed to have unique access to truth. Thus, truth is relative, but truth is also accessible to those who have been oppressed (so it is not entirely relative). Delgado argues, as it pertains to legal studies, everything is entirely dependent upon what is emphasized or if one fact is interpreted differently. He further rejects metanarratives that describe reality (or “a single true, or all-encompassing, description”). DiAngelo more explicitly states her view of objective reality, where she categorically rejects it, “There is no objective, neutral reality.”⁴¹ Judith Katz argues that “objective, rational linear thinking” is an aspect of “white culture,” so it is generally rejected.⁴²

The reason that Delgado attributes the absence of objective truth is that we create reality when we attempt to describe it. Thompson does not believe in objective truth because he sees it as relative depending on the group or individual who create truth claims.

Before proceeding to the second characteristic of truth in CRT, we must pause to note the dependence on postmodernism for these claims concerning truth. Postmodernism arose out of its rejection of metanarratives, which Delgado clearly affirms. Foucault saw truth as culturally bound and saw humans as unable to transcend our cultural limitations to attain objective truth. Thompson’s view on truth as culturally relative borrows this concept from Foucault. Finally, Delgado’s view that we participate in creating reality as we describe it is nearly an exact quote from Derrida, so the postmodern theme of the power of language to construct reality also characterizes CRT’s view of truth.

Second, CRT prioritizes experience over objectivity. Not all subjective experiences are equally valid, however. Rather, the place of a group in terms of society power dynamics determines their access to truth since the marginalized have unique access to truth that the dominant group does not.⁴³ Charles Lawrence states that outsiders (people of color) “must learn to trust our own senses, feelings, and experiences, and to give them authority, even (or especially) in the face of dominant accounts of social reality that claim universality.”⁴⁴ Particularly when it comes to claims of racism (or sexism or general claims of oppression), CRT contends that the oppressed group’s perspective is true. If an oppressed group views something as racist, then it is

racist. In one anecdote, Lawrence recounts that a colleague read a document and claimed it was offensive. Lawrence then states, “I am offended. Therefore, these materials are offensive.’ It is these words that are revolutionary. The author has done much more than offer a different perspective on the materials. She has given her/our perspective authority and in doing so has shown us that we can do the same” and in doing so, she “define[d] what is real.”⁴⁵

The Christian view of truth differs markedly from CRT. The Bible does not argue for one particular theory of truth but assumes the correspondence theory of truth, where something is called “true” if it corresponds to the world as God has created and ordered it. Since God alone is the Creator, omnipresent, and omniscient, he is the ultimate authority on truth. Similarly, God created all things, so he alone knows how the world works, though humanity can learn some of the mechanisms of the world.⁴⁶ The objective reality that exists we call “general revelation” in that it can be discerned or learned through study of the created order. Because we are finite, humanity does not have perfect access or understanding of general revelation. Our interpretation of general revelation may be skewed because we are creatures, and our sinful nature clouds our perception of what is true at times. While humanity may search out some of God’s truth via general revelation, God also reveals some truth (but not all) through special revelation (e.g., Scripture, Jesus, prophecy, etc.). Due to the nature of special revelation, it is often easier to understand as the objective truths it teaches are often stated explicitly, whereas general revelation most often needs to be studied and interpreted to be understood. Thus, from a Christian perspective, there is objective truth that we can discern, though we do not have exhaustive access to it because of our status as creatures who are limited, finite, and sinful.

What does CRT correctly perceive about truth? It rightly understands that people have unique experiences in the world. Someone’s experience from a different family, geographic location, ethnic background, among other categories, will give people insight into truths about the created and fallen world. As creatures dependent upon God, we are not omniscient, so we need other people to help us learn about God and the world in ways we would not know on our own. Second, as a consequence of the first point, Christians must listen to others’ experiences (James 1:19) to better understand and love people. Lived experiences matter and in order for us to “weep with those who weep” (Rom 12:15), we must listen to the experiences of

others because evil is perpetrated every day.

The view of truth espoused by CRT is not without error, however. The most significant problem is the outright contradiction between CRT's view that truth is relative and the Christian view that truth is objective. Beyond that (substantial) difference, CRT claims that experience is authoritative (at least, if people are from a certain racial group then their experience is authoritative). While CRT rightly understands that people have unique experiences, it errs when it makes these experiences authoritative. Christians affirm that facts are objective, but our experience of those facts is interpreted. We interpret our experiences all the time, and we are prone to interpret them incorrectly as well. Williams makes clear that the Bible serves as the final arbiter of reality rather than our experiences or feelings, "[the Bible] keeps me from taking my own conclusions and feelings too seriously. It is a two-thousand-page reminder that I am not the final word on reality."⁴⁷

We must admit that our interpretation of our experiences is not the final authority. To make my experiences the ultimate authority on any matter subverts the Creator-creature distinction.⁴⁸ We are creatures, not the Creator. Our knowledge and understanding are limited and finite. Not only that, but our interpretation can be tainted by sin as well, meaning we cannot assume we correctly interpret every situation. We cannot discern others' motivations and intentions accurately all the time. To claim to always have a valid interpretation of facts puts one in the place of God who alone has ultimate authority on what is true and false.

Accordingly, in CRT the "oppressed" person is always correct in his or her interpretation of situations, which gives a person a degree of autonomy that is not part of the Christian worldview. If we accept the fact that experience is infallible, then we have to accept different views that Christians cannot affirm. If experience (particularly of oppressed groups) is paramount, then we must accept the religious experience of a Muslim or Buddhist as a valid insight into religious truth, yet the Christian worldview would deny that other religions have an accurate understanding of the true God.⁴⁹ Furthermore, one group's experience is not automatically superior to another group's simply as a result of their ethnic or racial background.⁵⁰

If experience is not always true, then it means any claims of racism or sexism (or any claims, for that matter) must have supporting evidence. CRT says that any claim of racism is justified if the person experienced it as racist.

In the Christian worldview, we must be willing to admit some claims are false if they do not correspond to reality—not every claim of injustice is true. The Bible requires evidence for claims against a person (Deut 19:15-20; 1 Tim 5:19). Claims are not believed simply because someone argues that he or she is a victim of oppression.⁵¹ If we want to combat injustice, it means that we must fight against actual injustice. Thus, we look at evidence for claims because our interpretation of experiences can be incorrect.⁵²

There are two final elements of CRT's view on epistemology that do not cohere with the Christian worldview. Derrida's view (echoed by Delgado and Thompson) that we can create reality through our language puts us in the place of God who alone can speak things into existence. Our descriptions cannot create reality, only God can create something from nothing.

Finally, CRT contains contradictory notions of truth—it cannot be true that truth is relative and that oppressed groups have unique insight into truth. If truth is indeed relative (as Delgado, Thompson, and DiAngelo claim), then *no* group would have unique access to truth.

Humanity (Anthropology)

“My schooling gave me no training in seeing myself as an oppressor ... I was taught [wrongly] to see myself as an individual whose moral state depended on her individual moral will.” – Peggy McIntosh⁵³

“Although we are individuals, we are also—and perhaps fundamentally— members of social groups. These group memberships shape us as profoundly, if not more so, than any unique characteristic we may claim to possess.” – Sensoy and DiAngelo⁵⁴

CRT focuses on group identity rather than the individual. People are categorized by race, ethnic background, gender, sexual identity, among other classifications. These classifications of people are fundamental to their identity. Despite arguing race is fundamental to one's identity, Delgado also contends that race is a socially constructed category with no biological basis.⁵⁵ Because society groups people by their skin color, it remains a useful classification of people, even if it lacks biological basis (according to Delgado).

Moreover, the dominant group in a society can be classified as “oppressors” and any other group as “oppressed.” The oppressors impose their values and

views of knowledge on society, so society reflects the values and interests of those in power.⁵⁶

Each person also has features of more than one group—gender and race, for example—so they have “intersections” of identities and face varying forms of oppression as a result (called “intersectionality”). For example, a white female would face some privilege as a result of being white, but a form of oppression for being a woman. Thus, a white female is oppressed more than a white male. A black woman would face more oppression than a black man. The sum of the intersections though is not equal to the parts since discrimination cannot be accurately captured merely by aggregating all of one’s identities. The intersections of different identities help us to better understand the unique difficulties faced by people from different groups.⁵⁷

At root, CRT makes ethnic, gender, sexual preference as primary identity markers with the result of categorizing people as either oppressors or oppressed and analyzing how much oppression each person faces as a result of their various identities.

The Christian view of humanity is rooted in Genesis 1-3 where the Bible communicates that God created humanity, both male and female, in his own image (Gen 1:26). The purpose for which he created humanity was to fill the earth and rule over it under God’s authority. The image of God means that every person is worthy of profound dignity and respect. The fundamental aspect that binds all of humanity together is the creation in the image of God. Furthermore, Paul affirms that God created every nation and determined their locations, “And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their dwelling place” (Acts 17:26). People eventually defy God’s purposes to fill the earth by gathering together at Babel (Gen 11:1-9; cf. Gen 3), but God responds to their disobedience by scattering them throughout the earth. Moreover, this scattering of people ultimately leads to the diversity of languages and peoples. Thus, God created Adam and Eve in his image, forming the foundational identity of all humanity and eventually oversaw their scattering into all places.

Humanity not only shares the image of God, but all humanity is also “in Adam.” Being “in Adam” means that we all share in sin and death (Rom 5:12-17; 1 Cor 15:22). None of us are innocent, none of us are taught to be selfish, jealous, or covetous—post-fall, we all “naturally” have these attitudes

within us. Sin transcends any group identity; it is not exclusive to one group or another. Paul further states that “all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23) regardless of one’s group identity. No group identity can absolve us of our sin and tendency to evil.

Those who believe in Jesus share another identity, that of being “in Christ.” Our identity in Christ transcends all group identities.⁵⁸ By virtue of being in Christ, God alone grants us the verdict of “not guilty” of sin on the basis of the death of Jesus. At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit indwells God’s people and out of the diversity of languages and nations, he brings unity, showing that the diversity brought about at Babel is transcended (though not eliminated) in Jesus (Acts 2:7-12).

The anthropology of CRT has many conflicts with the Christian worldview. First, CRT emphasizes group membership. Its goal is to reveal structures of power and so divide people on the basis of their group identity. Thus, there is no fundamental connection between all groups. Christians, of course, do not deny that group identities exist. When Paul says, “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal 3:28), he is not saying that these identities do not exist, but these identities are not *primary* for the Christian. Rather, our identity “in Christ” becomes primary for both how God views us as well as how we ought to view one another. In addition, each person has unique characteristics as a result of being made in the image of God (contrary to what DiAngelo and Sensoy claim). More fundamental to group identity is the fact that humans are created in the image of God and are fallen “in Adam.”

Second, CRT grants superiority to oppressed groups—these groups alone can speak authoritatively on matters of race.⁵⁹ Moreover, it identifies most undesirable traits with “white” people.⁶⁰ Fundamentally, this view of granting superiority to “oppressed” groups and highlighting the unfavorable traits of white people is ethnic exclusivism. Paul’s focus is not on ethnic exclusivism, but on the unity we have if we are in Christ—“For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith” (Gal 3:26). Jews and Greeks were not divided in their ethnic identities, but united through Christ (Col 3:11).

The drive to segregate people on the basis of ethnic identity mars the image of God found in people because individuals are reduced to mere ciphers of a particular group or class.⁶¹ We are not individuals who are made in the image of God, according to CRT, but fundamentally a group (whether positive or

negative). Of course, we do not want to minimize that there are differences among individuals, genders, and groups, but the Bible does not *fundamentally* see humanity as members of a “racial” or ethnic group. Rather, the three unifying portraits the Bible speaks of are being in the image of God, “in Adam,” and “in Christ” (for Christians). As Neil Shenvi claims, “To see our brothers and sisters as ‘oppressors’ solely because of their demographic group is to re-erect the dividing wall of hostility that Christ torn down” (Eph 2:14).⁶²

The focus on group identities leads CRT to demonize one particular group, which leads us to the issue of sin.

Sin (Hamartiology)

“Racism is ordinary, not aberrational.”– Delgado and Stefancic⁶³

“Many critical race theorists and social scientists hold that racism is pervasive, systematic, and deeply ingrained. If we take this perspective, then no white member of society seems quite so innocent.”– Delgado and Stefancic⁶⁴

“A positive white identity is an impossible goal. White identity is inherently racist; white people do not exist outside the system of white supremacy ... to be less white is to be less racially oppressive.” – Robin DiAngelo⁶⁵

“Progress in American race relations is largely a mirage obscuring the fact that whites continue, consciously or unconsciously, to do all in their power to ensure their dominion and maintain their control.” – Derrick Bell⁶⁶

CRT and Original Sin

Because CRT understands that societies are fundamentally structured on power dynamics, oppression or power becomes the fundamental problem for humanity. Oppression takes many forms, and CRT focuses primarily on race, so racism is said to be the specific manifestation of oppression (in the USA). Therefore, I will label racism as the “original sin” according to many critical race theorists.⁶⁷ The definition of “racism” differs from more popular and historic understandings of the term. Usually, most people understand racism as “prejudice or discrimination against a group of people on the basis

of their membership to a racial or ethnic group, or as a result of their skin color.” However, in 1970, Patricia Bidol-Padva redefined racism to mean “prejudice plus power,” meaning that only those in power can be guilty of racism.⁶⁸ CRT proponents further argue that systemic racism in America exists and has existed since the beginning of European life in America (around the early 1600s). If prejudice plus power equals racism, then critical race theorists argue that all whites are assumed guilty because whites hold the positions of power. Thus, whether or not a white person has prejudices of people based on their race, they are complicit in the racist system of America. Jemar Tisby affirms the argument that white people are complicit with racism when he says, “In light of these definitions [of racism meaning prejudice plus power], it is accurate to say that many white people have been complicit with racism.”⁶⁹ Thus, for critical race theorists, oppression is the “original sin” and the most obvious manifestation of it is racism in the American system. Because of their complicity in America’s racist system, all whites are guilty of racism. Guilt, then, is not assigned on the basis of individual actions but on group membership.⁷⁰

The Christian view of sin, especially its view of original sin, is broader. First, the first sin committed in the Garden is that of pride, or the desire to be like God. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil represented the desire to choose for ourselves what constitutes good and evil rather than relying on God. The underlying sin, then, is the desire to be like God and be our own rulers rather than living under God as our king.

Furthermore, the Bible makes clear that sin is pervasive and all-encompassing when Paul says, “so death spread to all men because all sinned” (Rom 5:12). None are innocent of sin; Paul indicts both Jews and Gentiles (Rom 3:9-12). No ethnic group is more liable for sin than others. The only group singled out as being judged more harshly are teachers (James 3:1). Jesus makes clear that sin is not just actions that dishonor God, but thoughts and intentions as well (Matt 5:21-30).

It almost goes without saying, but, to be explicit, racism is a sin. Specifically, it is the sin of partiality and violates the commands for impartial judgment and love for neighbor (Lev 19:15; James 2:1-4; Exod 23:1-3; Deut. 16:19). Moreover, racism makes race supreme, not God. It incurs the guilt of worshiping created things rather than the Creator (Rom 1:25). Racism not only sins against other humans, but it fails to give God the glory

he deserves since it makes race an object of devotion. Thus, it also disobeys the first command of having no other gods before God. By devaluing the Creator, it allows humans to put something else first, and treat God's image bearers unjustly.⁷¹ Thus, Christians must speak out against those who seek to judge or treat others on the basis of their skin color.

CRT rightly highlights certain elements about racism. Systems of power can promote sin. Jim Crow laws, apartheid, slavery, emperor worship in ancient Rome, and Nebuchadnezzar's decree to worship the golden statue (Dan 3), all demonstrate the way that systems can promote and amplify sin. We need to be aware of these systems and oppose them. Bidol-Pravda's definition of racism, mentioned earlier, is insightful and can be utilized at different times, but is not useful as the sole definition of the term "racism."

When we analyze CRT's view of what is wrong with the world, we see that it focuses too narrowly when diagnosing the overarching problems in the world. In contrast, the Christian view implicates all people in sin, not just some. All people can be guilty of a specific sin, even though not all are. Most significantly, CRT changes the definition of racism to actually *limit* the scope of sin and exonerate some from sin. By making racism only equivalent to prejudice plus power, it makes any person who does not hold power guiltless of the sin of racism. Instead, anyone who holds prejudice of someone on the basis of their skin color is guilty of the sin of partiality, and we cannot ignore these sins. Sins are attitudes of the heart, not just matters concerning one's position in society. No matter one's ethnic or racial background, he or she can degrade the image of God in another person through prejudice.⁷² When we downplay prejudices that minority groups have while condemning the majority group for these same sins, we show partiality and pervert what the Bible calls justice.

CRT and the Redefinition of Racism

A major issue with the new definition of racism is that it is never argued for, but merely assumed in these discussions. If we are going to redefine the term "racism" from its traditional meaning, then we must analyze whether the new definition contains the same explanatory power as the original definition. While there is merit to understanding racism as including prejudice plus

power, to define it exclusively in this manner is shortsighted and absolves people of racism who are otherwise guilty of a sin. For example, if we adhere to a definition of racism meaning prejudice plus power, it would mean that while Hitler sat in a jail cell in the 1920s writing *Mein Kampf*, he was not guilty of racism because he had no power. It would mean that Nazis were no longer racist after World War II because they were out of power. The Ku Klux Klan would have become less racist after the Civil Rights Act in 1965 since their institutional power diminished. All of these examples demonstrate that the prejudice plus power definition of racism is lacking. Williams identifies the crux of the problem, “Institutional power is not a requirement for other sins to count as sin. Why should such power be a requirement for racism to count as sin?”⁷³

Thus, by defining racism in such a narrow manner, it justifies the sin of prejudice (and partiality) for those that do not have institutional power. Anyone guilty of prejudice on the basis of skin color must go to the cross for repentance and forgiveness, regardless of their position in society. To rationalize a sin through redefinition so that it only applies to a select group of people *promotes* sin. Most egregiously, it obscures the gospel. All racism must be confessed as sin to receive the grace of Jesus available at the cross. We give sinners a way out of sin by redefining a sin rather than taking them to the cross. Therefore, should Christians support a definition that exonerates those legitimately guilty of sin?

A second issue with the redefinition of racism to include institutional power is if CRT is true then we should find oppression only as a white, Western phenomenon. Delgado and Stefancic and DiAngelo only identify white people as the primary contributors to oppression since theorists focus exclusively on American or European examples of oppression. When we look at history and the current state of the world, we note Pol Pot, Mao Zedong, the Taliban, ISIS, Boko Haram, the Aztecs, Genghis Khan, to name just a few, were all guilty of murder, genocide, and oppression, yet none were white.⁷⁴

In addition, slavery was not a uniquely white European institution.⁷⁵ While there is no debate that Europeans brought slavery to the Americas, it is an overly simplistic view of history to argue that slavery was first practiced by Europeans. Thomas Sowell observes that at least a million Europeans were enslaved by North African pirates between 1500-1800, slave plantations existed in East Africa, Zanzibar, and that Arabs were the leading slave traders

in East Africa. India also had slaves and Brazil imported several times as many slaves as the US.⁷⁶ Of course this information does not mean slavery in America was justified. Slavery was a heinous, sinful institution. It degraded the image of God in people in the worst possible ways. The existence of slavery outside of the US tells us that oppression is not solely the domain of whites or Europeans. All people can be guilty of oppression and racism. To only highlight the sins of one particular skin color is historically inaccurate and justifies the sins of others. It can appear that theorists highlight the most egregious forms of sin of one group while downplaying any other group's sin.

A third issue with the redefinition of racism is that CRT assumes guilt on the part of whites for sin that they have not necessarily committed.⁷⁷ The Bible makes evidence of sin an explicit aspect of someone's guilt. Arguing that many or most whites are complicit in racism⁷⁸ as a result of their participation in the American system is not a contention that is affirmed in the Bible and actually contradicts the Bible's claim that guilt must be proven rather than assumed. We are to assume the best of our brothers and sisters (1 Cor 13:7). After all, the assumption that whites are guilty of racism as a result of complicity with a system runs into significant biblical hurdles. Was Paul guilty of complicity with slavery in the Roman Empire? Paul was a Roman citizen, and he never crusaded against institutional slavery (as far as we can tell). Was Jesus complicit in patriarchy (or slavery)? He benefited from a system of male privilege in the first century, and while he affirmed the dignity of women in some ways, he never actively crusaded against patriarchy. To affirm that someone is complicit because he or she did not actively fight against a system cannot be upheld in the Bible.

Of course, Christians can be guilty of sins of omission just as much as for sins of commission. No one denies that we can sin by *not* doing something just as much as we can sin by committing a certain act. Again, the Bible makes clear evidence is required before guilt can be declared. Keller states the dangers in the ideology of believing an entire group of people as guilty, "to see whole races as more sinful and evil than other races leads to things like the Holocaust."⁷⁹

Finally, the redefinition of racism leads to sin being seen more as a result of social structures. As the dominant majority participates in those structures, they implicate themselves in sin. CRT primarily identifies sin arising not arise from the hearts of individuals but from the societal structures. This

view of sin is in notable contrast to the Bible where evil is not structural but personal.⁸⁰ Sin can be perpetuated and amplified in social structures, but it first arises in the hearts of people.

Thus, CRT is deficient in its view of sin. It absolves any minority of the sin of racism because they are not in power, despite the fact that sin is not contingent upon one's political or social position. According to the Bible, any person can be guilty of any sin, regardless of their social status. Second, when CRT argues that white people are the primary oppressors, they omit key historical facts to further their case. Finally, it implicates an entire group of a specific sin without any evidence. While I understand that the argument is that whites are complicit in systemic racism in America, more specificity needs to be made to substantiate a charge that all whites are complicit in this system. The Bible condemns all people of sin but requires evidence for guilt of specific sin. Moreover, participation in a system does not mean one is morally guilty and complicit in a certain sin. Many people benefit from the current system (e.g., Asians in higher education) who are not implicated in racism, and the benefits white people derive from historical racism are fairly vague and imprecise. Finally, Jesus received many advantages because he was a man, and he did not try to dismantle the patriarchal system, yet he was not morally guilty or complicit in some sin. Privilege does not entail guilt or sin.

Salvation (Soteriology)

“But there is no neutrality in the racism struggle ... One either allows racial inequities to persevere, as a racist, or confronts racial inequities, as an antiracist. There is no in-between safe space of ‘not racist.’ The claim of ‘not racist’ neutrality is a mask for racism.” — Ibram X. Kendi⁸¹

Kendi contends that the way out of racial strife for white people is to confess their guilt of participating in systemic racism and acknowledging their privilege. When reading various theorists, the common action point to fighting against oppression, racism, or white privilege can be loosely called “activism.” For Kendi, the general goal is to become an “antiracist” through legislative action and other systemic changes. Others have more vague suggestions but the general goal is the same: to actively oppose racist structures in American society.⁸² For Christian proponents of CRT, it often involves corporate

repentance and corporate actions by white churches to acknowledge their ancestors' guilt over racism, followed by reparations of some kind.⁸³ Thus, white privilege and white guilt over slavery are sins that uniquely require corporate repentance by all white people, which is a way to "atone" for these past sins.

The language of expiation or atonement is not simply pejorative, meant to unfairly highlight the differences between Christian views of salvation and those of CRT. James Cone makes the religious nature of CRT clear when he says,

When whites undergo the true experience of conversion wherein they die to whiteness and are reborn anew in order to struggle against white oppression and for the liberation of the oppressed ... it is the black community that decides both the authenticity of white conversion and also the part these converts will play in the black struggle for freedom ... unless whites can get every single black person to agree that reconciliation is realized, there is no place whatsoever for white rhetoric about the reconciling love of blacks and whites ... just because we work with them and sometimes worship alongside them should be no reason to claim that they are truly Christian and thus part of our struggle.⁸⁴

Note the religious language that Cone uses: conversion, reborn anew, reconciliation, converts. He uses Christian terminology to describe the change that whites (and only whites) need to have when it comes to racism. It is not God who justifies and renders one "not guilty," it is "every single black person." His language encapsulates how CRT clearly challenges the Christian view of salvation and offers an alternative form of it.

The Bible offers forgiveness of sins through Jesus apart from any works (Eph 2:9). People must confess their sin and believe in Jesus to be saved (Acts 2:38). Confession of sin concerns the acknowledgement of being "in Adam" and thus, inherently sinful. The Bible never commands people to confess sins that there is no evidence they have committed. In addition, all sins are covered through the death of Jesus, who alone removes the guilt of sin from a person (1 John 1:9).

Salvation in the Bible does not come through any form of social action. The Old Testament (OT) prescribes restitution for various offenses committed against others, but only in specific cases (and not for salvation). Exodus 22

details those cases, and most of them concern liability for injury or loss due to someone's animal or liability for loss of property. The restitution is made between individuals; the OT does not prescribe restitution for corporate issues.

In the New Testament (NT), if a Christian sins against another Christian, the one who sinned should repent, confess, and ask for forgiveness (Matt 5:24).⁸⁵ Jesus here is referring to *a specific instance of sin*, not sin in general or sin committed by others. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that when speaking of the thief, Paul says, "Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need" (Eph 4:28). Paul does not say that the thief needs to return the goods that were stolen, though it is certainly possible that he has the OT restitution laws in the background of his admonition. However, this passage, like Matthew 5, speaks of an individual committing an act of sin. Christians are nowhere exhorted to confess nor grant restitution for sins they have not committed.

It is the area of individual sin and corporate sin that the Christian worldview conflicts with CRT. In CRT, confession, repentance, and activism "atone" for either the past guilt of America's sin of racism or the current racist structures that are in place (though one can never do sufficient activism to atone for past guilt). Christian proponents of CRT would not see activism as "atonement," but in identifying racism as a unique issue that all white people need to be aware of, confess, repent, and make amends for, it makes confession and making amends for racism appear to be another gospel, though no Christian would actually explicitly state it in this manner. What other sin committed by previous generations does the Bible command entire groups of people to confess, repent, and make amends for? The Bible commands confession, repentance, and reparations for individual sins, not collective sins. For Israel's collective sins, God commands them to confess and repent (e.g., Deut 30:1-2), but it is most often for sins they have recently committed. Frequently, God commands corporate repentance for idolatry or forsaking him (though other sins are mentioned as well), but those are sins actively being committed by God's people—not sins committed by previous generations.⁸⁶ Thus, identifying white privilege and past white guilt over slavery as sins that need to be repented of by all white people, CRT functionally creates another gospel that is smuggled into the true gospel.⁸⁷

Furthermore, by arguing for complicity of an entire group of people for sin, it makes forgiveness and reconciliation between groups impossible since sin is always attributed to the group in power, and there is no way to remove that sin except by overturning the current social and political order.

Corporate repentance by a certain ethnicity is not found in the NT. Paul tells Jewish Christians who are living under active oppression from Rome that they have already been reconciled to Gentiles through the death of Jesus (Eph 2:14). There is no command for corporate repentance of Gentiles for the ways they have oppressed Jews in their history. Paul does not tell the Romans to crusade against their unjust government systems, so the argument that activism is a necessity lacks merit from a Christian worldview. Thus, the Bible rejects the assumed need for one ethnic group to confess guilt for sins that they themselves never committed. Corporate repentance is entirely appropriate when a group (e.g., a church, government) commits a specific sin, but what I wish to highlight is that the NT does not command corporate repentance by certain ethnic groups nor does it command corporate repentance for sins committed by previous generations.

Kendi also claims that becoming an antiracist is the only way one can prove one is not a racist. Stating that someone is assumed a racist unless he or she actively crusades against racism is not how the Bible speaks of guilt of a specific sin. Moreover, the view that one has to prove one is not a racist simply assumes that guilt must be assuaged through some form of work, which the Bible roundly condemns.

A final note about soteriology as it relates to CRT. As Williams notes, “the Bible also commands that we tell the truth, that we give generously, that we love our neighbor, and so on. None of these commands are optional. Yet none of these commands is the gospel.”⁸⁸ Christian CRT advocates claim that social justice is a gospel issue. There are significant biblical difficulties with this claim. The most obvious place to turn is Acts 2:14-40. In Peter’s sermon at Pentecost, he declares the gospel. Specifically, he speaks about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus as fulfillment of the OT, as proof that Jesus is Messiah, and the need of repentance in order to be saved. He gives no imperative for social justice in his sermon. During that time, about 2/3 of the Roman world was enslaved. The claim that social justice is a gospel issue would have to say that Peter either did not preach the gospel or preached a truncated gospel, but the text nowhere claims that Peter’s gospel presentation

was in any way insufficient. People at the end of Acts 2 begin selling their possessions to give to the poor—this is not the gospel itself, but it is clear that the text views it as fruit flowing *from* the gospel. Similarly, Paul nowhere crusades against systemic inequalities. He gives a less than direct appeal to Philemon to free Onesimus as a fellow brother in Christ, but nowhere in that letter does he criticize the Roman institution of slavery. We must not make social justice the priority, thereby making fruit flowing from the gospel the same as the gospel itself. The gospel is the priority—justice is not optional, but it is not the gospel itself. We cannot let something that comes from the gospel become the gospel, lest it distort the gospel.

In Luke 4, Jesus cites Isaiah 61, showing that he intended “justice” as a theme of his ministry. Many social justice advocates use this passage to show that Jesus cared about confronting injustice. There were many issues of injustice in Jesus’ day—slavery, infanticide, misogyny, tyrannical rule, among others. However, we find that Jesus did not directly confront any of these issues. Rather, the “good news to the poor” likely referred to the arrival of the kingdom of God in Jesus’ ministry (Mark 1:14-15). Immediately after he preaches this sermon, Jesus casts out a demon, heals many people of physical ailments, and preaches the good news of the kingdom in various synagogues. Thus, if we believe social justice is an essential feature of the gospel, we have to say that Jesus preached and acted upon a condensed gospel. Instead, when Jesus proclaims justice, he meant healing the sick, proclaiming the good news about the reign of God, and teaching about God. Confronting acts of injustice are a consequence of the gospel, but to combine them with the gospel distorts what the actual gospel is and forces others to conform to one’s definition of social justice in order to be called a faithful follower of Jesus.

Creation (Cosmology)

Creation is the area that is most lacking clear statements from CRT. Part of this makes sense as CRT does not explicitly portray itself as a worldview. However, the lack of a coherent view of creation or humanity leads to wrong conclusions about humanity, as Keller says “unless you know what human beings are for, you will never come to any agreement as to what good or bad behavior is and therefore what justice is.”⁸⁹ For critical race theorists we exist in relation to other people and to other groups and the dominant form of

those relationships is oppression.⁹⁰

As a result of the lack of acknowledgement of a Creator (whether implicitly or explicitly), there is a belief in the autonomy of the individual to decide what is “his or her truth.” Individual autonomy leads one to construct his or her own standards of truth, morality, and even reality.⁹¹

In the Christian worldview, God creates all things—visible and invisible. It is he who decides what is right and wrong and passes his commands on to humanity. Humanity lives under God’s rule and reign. Humanity is finite and dependent. By taking fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, humanity decides that it does not want to live under God’s rule. This personal autonomy that humanity desires—the desire to be like God and rule for ourselves—is at the root of all sin.

It is precisely this point where CRT differs from Christianity. CRT advocates for group autonomy where the groups are the sole authority over what is right and wrong. Furthermore, each minority has an unfalsifiable interpretation of events in his or her life. This view is without a doubt a deficient view of humanity but also a deficient view of creation as well. If humanity (or minorities) can interpret their experiences and encounters without any possibility for a different interpretation on those experiences, then he or she functionally fills a role only the Creator can. The Christian worldview argues that humanity does not decide what is right and wrong or how to define one’s identity—that is the sole prerogative of the Creator and revealed in God’s written word.

CAUTIONS FOR THE CHURCH

It is essential for Christians to formulate a response to CRT because it has entered the church without much analysis or critique until recently and has been adopted wholesale by many evangelicals. As an example of how this thinking has been adopted by evangelicals, I will highlight four concerning CRT concepts found in a recent bestseller *The Color of Compromise*.⁹²

First, Tisby accepts the redefinition of racism as prejudice plus power or a system of oppression based on skin color rather than prejudice based on skin color.

What do we mean when we talk about racism? Beverly Daniel Tatum provides a shorthand definition: racism is a system of oppression based on race.⁹³ Notice Tatum's emphasis on systemic oppression. Racism can operate through impersonal systems and not simply through the malicious words and actions of individuals. Another definition explains racism as prejudice plus power. It is not only personal bigotry toward someone of a different race that constitutes racism; rather, racism includes the imposition of bigoted ideas on groups of people.⁹⁴

Tisby accepts Tatum's (and Bidol-Padva's) (re)definition of racism without arguing why it is valid or better than the previous definition (of simply prejudice). Though he includes personal prejudice, he widens the definition and primarily focuses on the systematic definition of racism. By subtly redefining racism (he never says he has changed the definition from what had previously been accepted though it is clear he has), he states that racism today is the same as it was in the 1800s, it just shows up in a new way.⁹⁵ In reality, he has simply changed the definition of racism, so it is unwarranted to claim that whites today are guilty of the same sin as those from the 1800s. No logical person would argue that racism today is as it was in the 1800s when an entire group of people was enslaved based solely on the color of their skin. Tisby redefines racism and then makes a historically false assertion to further his thesis.⁹⁶

Second, Tisby accepts the postmodern (and CRT) tenet that all relationships are about power. Though he identifies the fact that society can be stratified through different categories, the primary dynamic among individuals is power, and power is focused among white people in American society. Tisby states,

White complicity with racism isn't a matter of melanin, it's a matter of power. Whether society is stratified according to class, gender, religious, or tribe, communities tend to put power in the hands of a few to the detriment of many. In the United States, power runs along color lines, and white people have the most influence.⁹⁷

There is no nuance to his comment, he simply wholesale adopts a CRT (and postmodern) tenet without offering any critique.⁹⁸ Tisby's quotation makes it clear that he simply takes the worldview of CRT and applies it

to the white American church throughout history. As discussed above, attributing all disparities and differences as a result of race does not take into account the myriad of reasons people make decisions and encounter differing results. Moreover, though power plays a major role in society, it is not the only factor that accounts for the relationships among people. Also, race is not the only point of view through which to view the complexity of modern relationships and dynamics.

Third, Tisby assumes guilt on the part of all white American Christians. He argues,

Racist attitudes produced different actions in 1619 than they did in 1919 or 2020. The malleability and impermanence of racial categories help explain how the American church's compromise with racism has become subtler over time. History demonstrates that racism never goes away; it just adapts.⁹⁹

While he admits that different actions are produced in 1619 than in 2020 (though he still labels both as “racism”), he assumes that different outcomes are fueled by the same attitudes. He (rightly) acknowledges that racial categories change over time, but he then assumes that even though racial categories change, racism is still the root since racism never goes away. While racism will never completely disappear from a fallen world, it is an *assumption* that racism can never be ameliorated and that it simply morphs and changes over time. Yet, Tisby would be hard-pressed to support the claim that the racial prejudices of today are the same as they were in 1619. If they are different, then is it possible that racial prejudice in the United States has diminished over time? Tisby simply adopts the assumption of guilt proposed by DiAngelo and other CRT proponents without actually showing evidence of this guilt. He further adds,

Since the 1970s, Christian complicity in racism has become more difficult to discern. It is hidden, but that does not mean it no longer exists ... even as it has taken on subtler forms. Again, we must remember: racism never goes away; it adapts.¹⁰⁰

Furthermore, he again makes an assumption that Christian complicity with racism still exists even if it is difficult to discern. Tisby never entertains the idea that racism may have diminished over time. He simply concludes that white Christians are racists and then views contemporary society through this

lens. As with any other sin, common grace dictates that certain sins can be reduced in a society. Of course, certain sins never completely disappear—one claims that racism is completely gone in the USA—but it is a mere allegation to say that even if we cannot detect something that it *must* still exist.

Fourth, he contends that participation in a social system means complicity with its sins, as he says,

Since the late 1960s, the American church's complicity in racism has been less obvious, but it has not required as much effort to maintain. Nowadays, all the American church needs to do in terms of compromise is cooperate with already established and racially unequal social systems.¹⁰¹

Tisby makes an audacious claim that, basically, all the American church needs to do to be racist is to exist. If the church simply participates in normal civic life in America, Tisby argues that means it cooperates with an already established and racially unequal social system. In what other situation do we view someone or something as complicit simply for existing in the midst of a sinful society? Is the Chinese church complicit in the genocide of the Uighurs? Were all Turkish Christians complicit in the genocide of the Armenians? Was the Christian church in Rome complicit in infanticide or slavery or misogyny in the first century? I suspect that Tisby would not view complicity in the same way in other circumstances. Yet, he unquestioningly adopts the core tenets of CRT and the assumption of guilt on all “white” American Christians. His assumption of guilt is most troubling because it is explicitly condemned in the Bible. Nowhere can someone be found guilty without concrete evidence.

More quotes from Tisby could be added, but the point has been sufficiently made—his book is a bestseller among Christians, and he uncritically adopts tenets of CRT. CRT is already in the church, and thoughtful conversations need to take place concerning both the positive and negative aspects of it.

The particular danger of Tisby's claims is that everything is viewed through the lens of race. Race matters—it obviously has impacted American society and other cultures throughout human history—but it is not the only prism through which to view the world. If we find that we always resort to race for any issue (or really any other individual characteristic such as gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc.), then it is likely we fail to see the world in

all its complexities. Race does not account for every inequality nor is it the explanation for every difference—gender, socio-economic status, religion, and many other features combine to explain the many complexities of historical and social dynamics.

More generally, when oppression becomes the only way we see things, then our view has become distorted. Of course, oppression exists and influences many circumstances in this world. If it is the lens through which we view *all* interactions, then we have made oppression (a very specific form of sin) our primary worldview rather than the Bible. It causes us to experience or interpret things that are not there. Bradley rightly cautions,

Does white supremacy explain everything that is wrong in America? No. Does racism explain all racial struggles and racial disparities that non-white faces in America? No. That view is overly simplistic, unsophisticated, and monistic. The world is too complex for one theory to explain all of the differentiated ways we see the implications of the Genesis 3 reverberate throughout American culture where class and race intersect.¹⁰²

HOW THEN SHALL WE LIVE?

The danger with CRT is not simply its divisiveness or some of its historical inaccuracies. Rather, the problem is that it claims to be merely a tool but actually is also a totalizing worldview that proclaims racism as the original sin that must be confessed by all white people who, in order to atone for this sin, must actively crusade against it. Only once a person has joined the crusade (and steadfastly continues in it) can he or she be seen to atone sufficiently for the sin of racism. This is not the gospel that the Bible proclaims and to buy into it wholeheartedly is to turn away from the hope that the Bible proclaims in Jesus' name. Racism is very clearly a sin, an affront to the image of God in people. It is not a sin that only white people are guilty of—all must reckon with prejudices that they hold in their hearts (as well as ways we might contribute to societal injustices). Moreover, CRT relies on a number of assumptions and foundations which outright contradict general and special revelation. How then should Christians work in the current milieu? We must be people who are characterized by truth. This means that Christians must believe true narratives, seek real explanations for differences, avoid broad statements, and admit when we are wrong.

Believe True Narratives

As Christians, we are called to be characterized by truth as we speak the truth in love (Eph 4:15, 25). The OT prohibition against false witness (Exod 20:16) demonstrates love for neighbor and love for God who does not lie. What does this practically mean when it comes to CRT? It means Christians must wait to respond to events in our world until we know what the facts are. Christians often have been guilty of speaking out against a narrative that was later proven to be false. For example, how many Christians still refer to the police shooting of Michael Brown as one where Michael Brown was shot with his hands up in surrender? The initial narrative was that Michael Brown said “hands up, don’t shoot!” However, this narrative was proven to be false by the Department of Justice (under Attorney General Eric Holder).¹⁰³ As recently as June 2020, I repeatedly read Christians claiming this was an example of an unjustified police shooting, despite several grand juries (and eyewitness accounts) indicating the opposite. The point is that Christians cannot simply parrot the initial narrative of an event without seeking out the truth first.

Seek True Explanations

Furthermore, CRT “finds” systemic injustice simply through unequal outcomes and then implicates that area as racist.¹⁰⁴ However, unequal outcomes are not always the result of discrimination. As Williams notes “different people with different priorities making different choices will experience different outcomes.”¹⁰⁵ In the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25:14-30, there are unequal outcomes given to each person on the basis of how they used the money given to them. I would guess that we do not think Jesus’ affirmation of differing outcomes means he is guilty of injustice of some kind.

Of course, racism and sexism exist but not every unequal outcome is evidence of systemic injustice. When we buy into the narrative of CRT without seeking the truth, we will try to overthrow every system where there is an unequal outcome and argue that it is a “gospel issue” and indict fellow believers for white supremacy if they do not join the crusade. If we are to seek true justice, then we must be willing to question whether discrimination is the best explanation.¹⁰⁶

When we repeat an incorrect narrative or argue every unequal outcome is systemic injustice, it actually undermines our efforts at true justice. If

we want to focus on true examples of injustice, we must not point to false examples of injustice—it mars our other efforts.

Avoid Broad Statements

A third practical matter is that we must avoid broad statements, such as “all white people are guilty of racism.” This statement (and others like it) is actually racist because it indicts people solely on the basis of their skin color.¹⁰⁷ Accusing white people of racism without evidence is slander. A fair test is this: Would we be comfortable making critical designations about any other group of people? If we would not be, then we should not make them about another group. Furthermore, Lindsay and Pluckrose articulate it well when it relates to broad accusations of racism against particular groups of people,

It is bad psychology to tell people who do not believe that they are racist—who may even actively despise racism—that there is nothing they can do to top themselves from being racist—and then ask them to help you. It is even less helpful to tell them that even their own good intentions are proof of their latent racism. Worst of all is to set up double-binds, like telling them that if they notice race it is because they are racist, but if they don’t notice race it’s because their privilege affords them the luxury of not noticing race, which is racist.¹⁰⁸

Admit When We are Wrong

Fourth, we must be able to admit we are wrong and have a way to prove we are wrong. Our current cultural climate is focused on outrage, and no amount of information or facts will sway either side. We dismiss counter arguments through attacks on a person’s gender, skin color, or “privilege.” Sometimes, we may state that if a person disagrees it just proves that what we are saying is true.¹⁰⁹ If our arguments are unfalsifiable, then they are not based in truth.¹¹⁰ Furthermore, we must charitably read and critically think through opposing views to see if our views need to be modified. If we only read the views that support our current position, we live in a perpetual echo chamber where our views cannot be formed or shaped by the truth.

Similarly, our culture’s tendency is to assume the worst—assume someone is being sexist, racist, or bigoted rather than giving people the benefit of the doubt. If we are to be characterized by truth, we must be willing to entertain less infuriating explanations for situations or events. This does not mean we

downplay actual injustice, but we do not view every perceived comment or situation as being racially charged. Even when facts overturn a situation (such as the Michael Brown situation), it appears that people would rather be outraged or justified in their (wrong) outrage rather than follow the truthful explanation. C. S. Lewis puts it well:

Suppose one reads a story of filthy atrocities in the paper. Then suppose that something turns up suggesting that the story might not be quite true, or not quite so bad as it was made out. Is one's first feeling, "Thank God, even they aren't quite so bad as that," or is it a feeling of disappointment, and even a determination to cling to the first story for the sheer pleasure of thinking your enemies are as bad as possible? If it is the second then it is, I am afraid, the first step in a process which, if followed to the end, will make us into devils.¹¹¹

The Westminster Larger Catechism (q. 144) further states the Christian responsibility for truth in all matters, "The duties required are, the preserving and promoting of truth between man and man, and the good name of our neighbor, as well as our own; appearing and standing for the truth; and from the heart, sincerely, freely, clearly, and fully, speaking the truth, and only the truth, in matters of judgment and justice, and in all other things whatsoever." Similarly, people who seek truth are more likely to make the world a just place since "truth is the decisive factor between *doing* justice and *thinking* we are."¹¹²

CONCLUSION

The basic question we must ask ourselves is: does our vision of justice look like the world's? If our vision of justice aligns completely with a particular party (Republican or Democrat), then we need to ask if we have a truly Christian version of justice or if we have been coopted by a political party. God commands us to seek justice, and to do so in a uniquely Christian way means that we should find ourselves disagreeing with both political parties. Rarely does a political party align perfectly with Christian values.¹¹³

What, then, shall we do with CRT? On the one hand, we can acknowledge that it points to some under-evaluated aspects of race. It rightly highlights the fact that institutions and systems can promote racism and racial inequalities.

Thus, CRT can serve as a useful, though limited, analytical tool. However, the major issue with CRT is that it is a metanarrative. Though derivative of postmodernism, which eschews metanarratives, CRT argues that there are largely invisible, systems of power that work to oppress minorities in the USA. It privileges knowledge obtained from the lived experiences of members of oppressed groups (or to state it more accurately, the *interpretations* of the lived experiences of these groups). CRT argues that objective truth is not possible and focuses exclusively on race as the explanation for all differences while ignoring elements of choice, socioeconomic status, family history, etc.

While CRT rightly understood is a tool for understanding *some* of the reasons for racial disparities, does utilizing this tool add anything that we not already obtain from a Christian worldview? The answer seems to be no. The Bible (and later creeds and confessions) clearly affirms that systems can promote sin and injustice, and several examples are identified in the Bible under Nebuchadnezzar, Antiochus IV, and the imperial cult under Nero. Church history (and present-day Christian experience) demonstrates that Christians have experienced their share of unjust worldly systems. Therefore, we do not gain elements from CRT that we do not already find in the Bible. But what do we give up if we utilize the tool of CRT? It makes *totalizing* claims, so we give up far more of the Christian worldview than we gain. Though CRT claims to be an “analytic tool,” it is, in fact, a metanarrative and since it is a metanarrative, it offers contradictory claims about truth, humanity, sin, and salvation from a biblical worldview, so Christians who want to seek true justice, must find an alternative to CRT, lest the gospel become diluted. We must formulate and promote a uniquely Christian view of justice that aligns with the Bible—not with a political party.

Moreover, we can agree that there are issues in minority communities, such as education, poverty, family disintegration, etc. While we may disagree about the ultimate cause of each of these areas, we should find ample room for agreement in solutions to combat them. We should debate—vigorously at times—the underlying reasons for problems in different communities, but, as Christians, we should focus on agreement in how to alleviate problems in these communities motivated by our commitment to Christian charity.

CRT rightly points out that racism is a problem and that it can affect entire institutions. However, when we rightly understand the effects of sin on this world and how Satan seeks to corrupt not only individuals but

societal structures as well, we already find the elements CRT highlights in the Bible and Christian tradition. Bradley's words serve as an apt conclusion by highlighting the limited value of CRT:

In the end, then, by centering racial injustice as the prime evil in American society, CRT is a reductionistic theory of human evil and suffering ... It is woefully inadequate to explain the nature of reality and to offer non-coercive solutions. That is, CRT is not good enough ... It does not tell us any more than what the Bible and the Christian tradition already acknowledge as a point of fact—namely, that people can be evil and that [Satan's kingdom] is wreaking havoc as far as the curse is found.¹¹⁴

¹ Thaddeus J. Williams, *Confronting Injustice without Compromising Truth: 12 Questions Christians Should Ask about Social Justice* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 7.

² *Ibid.*, 6-7.

³ This article will in, no way, be comprehensive about CRT. Book length responses to CRT have been released in the past few years. For a Christian response to CRT, see Owen Strachan, *Christianity and Wokeness: How the Social Justice Movement is Hijacking the Gospel – and How to Stop It* (Washington: Salem Books, 2021); Voddie T. Baucham, *Fault Lines: The Social Justice Movement and Evangelicalism's Looming Catastrophe* (Washington: Salem Books, 2021); Williams, *Confronting Injustice*. For a non-Christian response, see Helen Pluckrose and James A. Lindsay, *Cynical Theories: How Activist Scholarship Made Everything about Race, Gender, and Identity—and Why This Harms Everybody* (Durham, NC: Pitchstone, 2020).

⁴ Anthony Bradley, "Critical Race Theory Isn't a Threat for Presbyterians," *Mere Orthodoxy*, last modified February 3, 2021, accessed March 16, 2021, <https://mereorthodoxy.com/critical-race-theory-presbyterian-church-in-america/>.

⁵ Much of this summary has been adapted from Pluckrose and Lindsay, *Cynical Theories*, 21-66.

⁶ James Bohman, "Critical Theory," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, last modified March 8, 2005, accessed March 16, 2021, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2021/entries/critical-theory/>

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ James Lindsay, "Critical Theory," *New Discourses*, last modified July 8, 2020, accessed May 4, 2021, <https://newdiscourses.com/tfw-critical-theory/>.

⁹ Claudio Corradetti, "Frankfurt School and Critical Theory," *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, accessed March 16, 2021, <https://iep.utm.edu/frankfur/>.

¹⁰ Max Horkheimer, "Materialism and Morality," in *Critical Theory: The Essential Readings*, ed. David Ingram and Julia Simon-Ingram, Paragon Issues in Philosophy (Paragon House, 1998), 242.

¹¹ Lindsay, "Critical Theory."

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ Lindsay and Pluckrose, *Cynical Theories*, 22.

¹⁵ See below for more on the idea of culturally constructed knowledge.

¹⁶ Lindsay and Pluckrose, *Cynical Theories*, 272n1. It must be added that the Frankfurt School sought to critique liberalism as its focus was on a criticism of Western society.

¹⁷ For a more in-depth discussion of these principles and themes, see Lindsay and Pluckrose, 29-42.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 33.

- 19 Ibid., 34.
- 20 As Foucault states, “in any given culture and at any given moment, there is always only one episteme that defines the conditions of possibility of all knowledge, whether expressed in theory or silently invested in a practice” (Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* [Routledge: London, 2002], 168).
- 21 I would add here that postmodernism is correct in its basic assertion here though incorrect in its conclusion. Postmodernists are correct that there is an infinite number of ways to interpret any set of phenomena. However, they use this (correct) observation to conclude that none of those interpretations should be privileged over any others. While there are a large number of potential interpretations of a given situation, there is not an equally large number of *viable* interpretations of the world. Rather, there are constraints on accurately interpreting the world. Facts and correspondence to reality are two such constraints on valid interpretations of the world. More, of course, could be said, but would go beyond the scope of this article.
- 22 Lindsay and Pluckrose, *Cynical Theories*, 36.
- 23 In American culture, postmodernists typically posit that white males stand at the top of the power spectrum.
- 24 Lindsay and Pluckrose, *Cynical Theories*, 36.
- 25 Ibid., 37.
- 26 An example of the second principle of postmodernism would be the claim of sexism. If a woman claims sexism and someone requests evidentiary proof for that claim, it is inappropriate for the woman to give evidence of her claim because it is a request for her to participate in a system of discourse—namely, that of science and rationality, which is the dominant discourse in the West—that exists to perpetuate a male dominated hierarchy and seeks to oppress women. The dominant system of science and rationality excludes any other way of knowing—such as emotions—because including another method of “knowing” would alter the power structure. For a woman to prove her claim through scientific evidence means she would be participating in a system that seeks to uphold male power and makes her complicit in sexism.
- 27 Lindsay and Pluckrose, *Cynical Theories*, 28.
- 28 Ibid., 40. Technically, Roland Barthes came up with the concept of the “death of the author” but Derrida adapted it beyond textual readings.
- 29 Ibid., 47.
- 30 Postmodernists never explicitly state that either of these ideas are metanarratives. The fact that they treat both as a “given” indicates they function as metanarratives.
- 31 Antonio Tomas De La Garza and Kent A. Ono, “Critical Race Theory” *The International Encyclopedia of Communication Theory and Philosophy*, October 2016, accessed March 16, 2021, <https://onlineibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/9781118766804.wbiect260>
- 32 Purdue Writing Lab, “Critical Race Theory (1970s-present),” *Purdue Writing Lab*, accessed March 16, 2021, https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/subject_specific_writing/writing_in_literature/literary_theory_and_schools_of_criticism/critical_race_theory.html.
- 33 Lindsay and Pluckrose, *Cynical Theories*, 114.
- 34 Timothy Keller, “A Biblical Critique of Secular Justice and Critical Theory,” *Life in the Gospel*, last modified July 31, 2020, accessed May 3, 2021, <https://quarterly.gospelinlife.com/a-biblical-critique-of-secular-justice-and-critical-theory/>.
- 35 Lindsay and Pluckrose, *Cynical Theories*, 117.
- 36 Delgado, “Critical race theory builds on the insights of two previous movements, critical legal studies and radical feminism” (Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, 3rd ed., Critical America Book 20 [New York: NYU Press, 2017], 5).
- 37 The idea that CRT depends at least somewhat on traditional (or economic) Marxism fits with some of the data such as when Delgado and Stefancic attest, “for materialists, understanding the ebb and flow of racial progress and retrenchment requires a careful look at conditions prevailing at different times in history” (Delgado and Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, 22). Furthermore, Delgado and Stefancic state, “Derrick Bell argued that civil rights advances for blacks always seemed to coincide with changing economic conditions and the self-interest of elite whites” (Delgado and Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, 22). Finally, Delgado argues that those who wish to study race relations in U.S. history must analyze economic conditions, “revisionism is often materialist in thrust, holding that to understand the zigs and zags of black, Latino, and Asian fortunes, one must look to matters like profit, labor supply, international relations, and the interest of elite whites” (Delgado and Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, 25).
- 38 Delgado and Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, 5.

- 39 Richard Delgado, "Storytelling for Oppositionists and Others: A Plea for Narrative," *Michigan Law Review* 87, no. 8 (1989): 2416.
- 40 Cooper Thompson, "Can White Heterosexual Men Understand Oppression?," in *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*, ed. Maurianne Adams et al. (New York: Routledge, 2000), 478.
- 41 Robin DiAngelo, "My Class Didn't Trump My Race: Using Oppression to Face Privilege," *Multicultural Perspective* 8, no. 1 (2006): 54.
- 42 Judith Katz, "Some Aspects and Assumptions of White Culture in the United States," last modified 1990, accessed March 16, 2021, <https://www.cascadia.edu/discover/about/diversity/documents/Some%20Aspects%20and%20Assumptions%20of%20White%20Culture%20in%20the%20United%20States.pdf>.
- 43 Medina argues that privilege spoils people and leads to the "epistemic vices" or epistemic arrogance, epistemic laziness, and active ignorance. However, oppression confers "epistemic virtues" of epistemic humility, epistemic curiosity/diligence, and epistemic openness. See Jose Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and Resistant Imaginations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 30-35.
- 44 Charles R. III Lawrence, "The Word and the River: Pedagogy as Scholarship as Struggle," *California Law Review* 65 (1992): 2253.
- 45 *Ibid.*, 2255. The astute reader can see the echoes of Derrida occurring in what Lawrence states. By being offended, the interpreter makes the statement offensive, regardless of the intent.
- 46 Proverbs 25:2, "It is the glory of God to conceal things, but the glory of kings is to search things out."
- 47 Williams, *Confronting Injustice*, 138.
- 48 See Williams, who notes, "giving unquestioned status to the poor or oppressed or anything other than the Word of God erases the Creator-creature distinction" (*Confronting Injustice*, 154).
- 49 Clearly, other religions may have partial insight into who God is, but if experience is valid, then it means any experience—even one that contradicts the Bible—is legitimate.
- 50 As Shenvi states, "someone's membership of a marginalized group does not make them an infallible interpreter of reality" (Williams, *Confronting Injustice*, 137).
- 51 The idea that experience of racism means something racist was said or done derives from Derrida who argues that the speaker's intention does not matter as much as the impact on someone.
- 52 Williams states, "our lived experiences can be wrong. . . there is often a big difference between facts and feelings, between lived experience and objective reality. That difference matters, and we need to take both seriously if we want our quest for justice to lead to real justice" (*Confronting Injustice*, 144).
- 53 Peggy McIntosh, "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences through Work in Women's Studies," in *Race, Class, & Gender: An Anthology*, ed. Margaret L. Andersen and Patricia Hill Collins, 8th ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2012), 72.
- 54 Özlem Sensoy and Robin DiAngelo, *Is Everyone Really Equal?: An Introduction to Key Concepts in Social Justice Education*, 2nd edition., Multicultural Education Series (New York: Teachers College Press, 2017), 46.
- 55 Delgado and Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, 9.
- 56 Sensoy and DiAngelo, *Is Everyone Really Equal?*, 29.
- 57 Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the phrase "intersectionality" in her article "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989 no. 1 (1989): 139-67.
- 58 Williams, *Confronting Injustice*, 48.
- 59 Delgado and Stefancic, "Minority status, in other words, brings with it a presumed competence to speak about race and racism," *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, 11.
- 60 See DiAngelo's comments below in the section on "sin" section.
- 61 Williams identifies CRT as tribalistic when it divides "people into groups identities then assign[s] undesirable or evil traits to that group in such a way that we don't see the unique image-bearers of God before us," (*Confronting Injustice*, 39).
- 62 Williams, *Confronting Injustice*, 136-37.
- 63 Delgado and Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, 8.
- 64 *Ibid.*, 91.
- 65 Robin J. DiAngelo, *White Fragility: Why It's so Hard for White People to Talk about Racism* (London: Penguin, 2018), 149-50.2018
- 66 Derrick Bell, *And We Are Not Saved: The Elusive Quest for Racial Justice* (New York: Basic Books, 1989), 159.
- 67 McWhorter identifies "white privilege" as the original sin, but the difference between white privilege and racism is really a complementary way of discussing the same topic. McWhorter states, "the idea that whites

are permanently stained by their white privilege, gaining moral absolution only by eternally attesting to it, is [CRT]'s version of original sin" (John McWhorter, "The Virtue Signalers Won't Change the World," *The Atlantic*, last modified December 23, 2018, accessed March 17, 2021, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2018/12/why-third-wave-anti-racism-dead-end/578764/>).

- 68 Patricia A Bidol-Padva, *Developing New Perspectives on Race: An Innovative Multi-Media Social Studies Curriculum in Race Relations for the Secondary Level* (Detroit: New Detroit, 1970).
- 69 Jemar Tisby, *The Color of Compromise* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 16.
- 70 Keller, "A Biblical Critique of Secular Justice and Critical Theory." We can also see the influence of postmodernism and its assumption that all systems are built to ensure those in power continue to dominate. Critical Race Theory clarifies that those in power are white, while other studies supplement the dominant power structure by adding male, cisgender, and heterosexual as the characteristics of the dominant power structure in the United States.
- 71 Williams, *Confronting Injustice*, 17.
- 72 Evil is in all of us, and Williams states "if we do not reckon with this uncomfortable truth, then we will become the next oppressors," (*Confronting Injustice*, 46). Later, he states, "in a biblical worldview, wickedness is never associated with a single skin color" (*Confronting Injustice*, 102).
- 73 Williams, *Confronting Injustice*, 182. For the above examples and other examples of a prejudice plus power definition for racism as lacking explanatory power, see Williams, *Confronting Injustice*, 181.
- 74 See *ibid.*, 104 for these and more examples.
- 75 Cf. Tisby, *The Color of Compromise*, who states that "the process of enslavement began with the European desire for products that needed raw materials from the Americas," 29. Tisby implies that enslavement had not already been occurring in many other cultures and other times, which it assuredly had been. Enslavement between Africa and the Americas increased undoubtedly during this time, but had been a fixture of Africa, the Middle East, and Europe (during the Roman Empire) for hundreds, even thousands, of years. He acknowledges that the majority of slaves went to the Caribbean and South America (33), though he argues that American slavery was different. While there were unique aspects to American slavery, he again fails to mention that slavery occurred in the world well before 1619.
- 76 Thomas Sowell, *Black Rednecks & White Liberals* (New York: Encounter, 2005), 112–36.
- 77 Williams notes that CRT (or at least the popular expressions of it) is guilty of revisionist history, leading to propaganda, which ensures "individual members of that group can be judged on the basis of that group identity, regardless of how they live their lives," *Confronting Injustice*, 57.
- 78 See Tisby, *The Color of Compromise*, 16, 190–91, 213.
- 79 Keller, "A Biblical Critique of Secular Justice and Critical Theory."
- 80 *Ibid.*
- 81 Ibram X. Kendi, *How To Be an Antiracist* (London: One World, 2019), 9.
- 82 See Tisby, who argues for awareness, relationships, and commitment as the general focus, with specific suggestions in each category, *The Color of Compromise*, 192–212.
- 83 Latasha Morrison argues that the Christian church should be aware and lament, which leads to shame and guilt, which then leads to repentance, and finally reparations, with specific suggestions as to what reparations can look like. See Latasha Morrison, *Be the Bridge: Pursuing God's Heart for Racial Reconciliation* (Colorado Springs, CO: WaterBrook, 2019), 157–62. CO: WaterBrook, 2019
- 84 James Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997), 222. Quoted in Williams, *Confronting Injustice*, 49. It must be noted that Cone writes from a black liberation perspective, but many of his ideas have been repeated and developed by critical race theorists.
- 85 Tisby cites this passage to argue for reparations, *Color of Compromise*, 199. However, this passage does not speak at all about any restitution that is to be made. It is simply repentance and a request for forgiveness. Furthermore, he says "black people have endured innumerable offenses at the hands of white people in the American church" (199). While I do not disagree with his statement, the passage in Matthew 5 is referring to specific sin that an individual commits, it is not broadly applicable to entire groups of people, so he misinterprets this passage in arguing for reparations.
- 86 There are some examples of corporate repentance in the Bible—most notably Daniel 9 and Nehemiah 9. In both these passages, Daniel and Nehemiah confess past sins as well as their own sins. However, Daniel and Nehemiah *primarily* emphasize that their current sin is continuous with the past sins of Israel. Therefore, they are not confessing past sins, of which they are not guilty. Rather, they are showing that they are sinning in the same way as their ancestors, which is markedly different than whites—who are not slave owners—confessing the sin of their ancestors who held slaves.

87 McWhorter, not a Christian himself, identifies the religious aspects of CRT when he says, “The idea that whites are permanently stained by their white privilege, gaining moral absolution only by eternally attesting to it, is the third wave’s version of original sin” (McWhorter, “The Virtue Signalers Won’t Change the World”).

88 Williams, *Confronting Injustice*, 111.

89 Keller, “A Biblical Critique of Secular Justice and Critical Theory”

90 Neil Shenvi, “Christianity and Critical Theory – Part 2,” *Neil Shenvi - Apologetics*, November 3, 2018, accessed March 19, 2021, <https://shenvipologetics.com/christianity-and-critical-theory-part-2/>.

91 Again, note the similarities with the postmodern view on the relativity of morality and knowledge.

92 To be clear, my purpose is not to offer a full critique (or commendation) of *The Color of Compromise*. Rather, it is to show that major Christian book in the last few years has uncritically adopted many tenets of CRT. Further critiques or commendations of the book goes beyond the scope of this article.

93 Here he comments on Beverly Tatum’s definition, which is cited from her work in 1997 (Beverly Daniel Tatum, *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* (New York: Basic, 1997), though Bidol-Pavda originated the definition before Tatum.

94 Tisby, *The Color of Compromise*, 16.

95 See *ibid.*, 19.

96 Williams, *Confronting Injustice*, 180–82.

97 Tisby, *The Color of Compromise*, 17.

98 To go a step further, Tisby actually accepts this postmodern principle without nuance or even acknowledgement that he is entirely dependent on postmodernism.

99 Tisby, *The Color of Compromise*, 19.

100 *Ibid.*, 155.

101 *Ibid.*, 160.

102 Bradley, “Critical Race Theory Isn’t a Threat.”

103 The Department of Justice official report says this, “Furthermore, there are no witnesses who could testify credibly that Wilson shot Brown while Brown was clearly attempting to surrender. The accounts of the witnesses who have claimed that Brown raised his hands above his head to surrender and said ‘I don’t have a gun,’ or ‘okay, okay, okay’ are inconsistent with the physical evidence or can be challenged in other material ways. . .” (p. 83). The full report is available on the Department of Justice website, “Department of Justice Report Regarding the Criminal Investigation into the Shooting Death of Michael Brown by Ferguson Police Department,” March 4, 2015, https://www.justice.gov/sites/default/files/opa/pressreleases/attachments/2015/03/04/doj_report_on_shooting_of_michael_brown_1.pdf

104 Ibram X. Kendi, “Racial disparities must be the result of racial discrimination” (*Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America* [Bold Type Books: Lebanon, IN, 2016]), 11.

105 Williams, *Confronting Injustice*, 86.

106 It is also necessary to highlight how selective we are in criticizing unequal outcomes. For example, women are overrepresented in health care, Asians are underrepresented in the NBA, MLB, and NFL; men are the majority of soldiers, plumbers, and carpenters. Are these examples of discrimination (are men discriminated against in nursing?) or are these simply a matter of different people making different life choices?

107 Williams notes that “writing off someone’s viewpoint because of their melanin makes us actual racists. . . silencing someone’s ideas because of their sexuality, their economic status, or any other quality of their lives rather than the quality of their ideas does not make us a voice of justice for the marginalized: it makes us actual bigots” (Williams, *Confronting Injustice*, 153).

108 Pluckrose and Lindsay, *Cynical Theories*, 134.

109 Bailey argues that any disagreement is willful ignorance rather than acknowledging there may be legitimate reasons for disagreement, “Privilege-preserving epistemic pushback is a variety of willful ignorance that dominant groups habitually deploy during conversations that are trying to make social injustices visible” (Alison Bailey, “Tracking Privilege-Preserving Epistemic Pushback in Feminist and Critical Race Philosophy Classes, *Hypatia* 32 no. 4 [2017], 877). Applebaum likewise sees denying the truth of CRT means that a person is distancing himself or herself from the subject matter, “One can disagree and remain engaged in the material, for example, by asking questions and searching for clarification and understanding. Denials, however, function as a way to distance oneself from the material and to dismiss without engagement” (Barbara Applebaum, *Being White, Being Good: White Complicity, White Moral Responsibility, and Social Justice Pedagogy* [Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010], 43).

110 Williams states, “if no amount of logic, evidence, experience, or Scripture could possibly change our

outlook, then our beliefs are unfalsifiable,” *Confronting Injustice*, 150. He later states, “a good belief system. . . can spell out the ways in which it could be proved false” but [CRT] has “programmed responses that safeguard its core beliefs,” *Confronting Injustice*, 151. Furthermore, Yancey states [in critiquing DiAngelo and the concept of white fragility], “how can we test for white fragility? As far as I can tell, the only way a white person can’t be ‘fragile’ is if they agree with the accusations brought about them. . . this is not useful as a conceptual tool for hypothesis testing” George Yancey, “Not White Fragility—Mutual Responsibility: Review: ‘White Fragility’ by Robin DiAngelo,” *The Gospel Coalition*, last modified July 27, 2020, accessed March 16, 2021, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/white-fragility-mutual-responsibility/>.

¹¹¹ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2001), 118.

¹¹² Williams, *Confronting Injustice*, 146.

¹¹³ Williams asks, “does our vision of justice include anything the mainstream would reject?”, 34. Moreover, finding injustice is often focused on the oppressed by race, but do we likewise champion others who are oppressed, such as “terminated babies, homesplit children, those exploited by the pornography industry, the religiously persecuted, and socialism’s victims? The tunnel vision of [CRT] tends to leave these millions of oppressed people in the dark” (*Confronting Injustice*, 129).

¹¹⁴ Bradley, “Critical Race Theory Isn’t a Threat.”