

Introduction

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is an ideology that contends racism is systemic while proposing (and trying to legislate) that certain racial groups today should be held accountable for the historical acts of those who lived in generations past. As an ideology, CRT is pervasive in academia and corporate America, and it is making inroads into the church. This paper will argue that CRT is antithetical to Christianity because its tenets define morality, truth and justice in a way that is opposed to Scripture and logic. Nevertheless, some Christians see merit in using CRT as an analytical tool. I will argue, that since CRT is a “religion in all but name,”¹ it should be categorized as a false belief system which may lead believers astray. CRT is also philosophically inconsistent and lacks a *clear* way of implementation in the church as an analytical tool. In addition, I will support the claim that the Bible alone is sufficient to point out sins whether they are systemic and corporate, or among individuals and is therefore what will truly transform society for the “objective better.” However, by rejecting CRT, I am not minimizing the sins of churches in America (19th and 20th centuries) who did little to abolish slavery, segregation, and racism.²

Origin and Definition of CRT

Before a formal definition of CRT is given, it is necessary to note it originated in Karl Marx’s “Conflict Theory.”³ Marx in essence believed that society is comprised of multiple class structures of people who are competing (hence “conflict”) for limited resources. These class

¹ John McWhorter, *Woke Racism: How a New Religion Has Betrayed Black America* (NY: Portfolio Penguin, 2021), IX.

² G. LeMarquand “Racism” in *New Dictionary of Christian Apologetics*, eds. W.C. Campbell Jack, Gavin McGrath & C. Stephen Evans. (Downer’s Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2006), 589. LeMarquand notes, “When slavery flourished in the Southern United States, for example, many slave owners called themselves Christians, attended church, and even used biblical texts to give credence to the institution of slavery.”

³ Voddie Baucham, *Fault Lines: The Social Justice Movement and Evangelicalism’s Looming Catastrophe* (Washington, DC: Salem Books, 2021), xii.

structures were viewed in a negative light by Marx as he “cast suspicion upon structures of society that ostensibly were to protect the interests of everyone, when in actuality they served to protect the interests of the majority group and oppress those of minorities.”⁴ In Marxist theory, the competition for resources creates a dominant group. Robin DiAngelo notes that this competition creates what is known as hegemony, which is “social control...through conditioning rather than physical force or intimidation.”⁵ This concept of hegemony includes the voluntary consent of those who are in power (the oppressors) and those who are not in power (the oppressed).⁶ This web of hegemony influences political, social and cultural institutions in society.⁷

The concept of hegemony was further reinforced via the Frankfurt School in Germany circa 1923. Regarding the Frankfurt School, Voddie Baucham notes:

There was a group in Germany, which applied Marxism to radical interdisciplinary social theory. This group included Max Horkheimer, T.W. Adorno, Erich Fromm, Herbert Marcuse, Georg Kukacs, and Walter Benjamin and came to be known as the Frankfurt School. These men developed Critical Theory as an expansion of Conflict Theory and applied it more broadly, including other social sciences and philosophy. Their main goal was to address structural issues causing inequity.⁸

⁴ Scott Smith, “Can Critical Theory and Critical Race Theory, Ground Human Dignity, Justice and Equality?” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 26.2, (2022), 71.

⁵ Robin DiAngelo and Ozlem Sensoy, *Is Everyone Really Equal?: An Introduction to Key Concepts in Social Justice Education* 2nd ed. (NY: Teachers College Press, Columbia University, 2017),

⁶ Peter Ives. "Hegemony." In *The Encyclopedia of Literary and Cultural Theory*, edited by Michael Ryan. Wiley, 2011. <https://nvcc.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.credoreference.com/content/entry/wileylitcul/hegemony/0?institutionId=6148>

⁷ This seems like it may be the goal of *some* Christians...social control through conditioning rather than the work of spreading the gospel to transform society.

⁸ Baucham, *Fault Lines*, xiii.

What is significant to note is the way these men use the words “critical” and “theory.” By “critical” they are interested in exposing the injustices in society.⁹ When it comes to the word “theory,” the *New Discourses Encyclopedia* notes, “It is the set of ideas, modes of thought, ethics, and methods that define Critical Social Justice.”¹⁰ This is indicative that CRT is a philosophical worldview which has a position on metaphysical realities such as ethics and truth claims.

These ideas slowly came to the United States. John McWhorter divided the anti-racist movement in the United States into three waves. McWhorter notes, “Third Wave Antiracism becoming mainstream in the 2010’s, teaches that because racism is baked into society, whites’ complicity in living within it constitutes racism itself.”¹¹ The anti-racial movement in the United States went from trying to abolish racism, to seeing it as something *normal* and embedded in the very fabric of society.

This Third Wave movement fully embraces what is called CRT. The UCLA School of Public Affairs has provided an apt and succinct definition of CRT. They note:

CRT recognizes that racism is engrained in the fabric and system of the American society. The individual racist need not exist to note that institutional racism is pervasive in the dominant culture. This is the analytical lens that CRT uses in examining existing power structures. CRT identifies that these power structures are based on white privilege and white supremacy, which perpetuates the marginalization of people of color. CRT also rejects the traditions of liberalism and meritocracy. Legal discourse says that the law is neutral and colorblind, however, CRT challenges this legal “truth” by examining liberalism and meritocracy as a vehicle for self-interest, power, and privilege. CRT also recognizes that liberalism and meritocracy are often stories heard from those with wealth, power, and privilege. These stories paint a false picture of meritocracy; everyone who works hard can attain wealth, power, and privilege while ignoring the systemic inequalities that institutional racism provides.¹²

⁹ Concerning “critical”, “critical” to CRT it means something like “cynical”. CRT approaches culture with the view that Western civilization and, particularly Christianity, has created injustices.

¹⁰ New Discourses, <https://newdiscourses.com/tftw-theory>.

¹¹ McWhorter, *Woke Racism*, 5.

¹² <https://spacrs.wordpress.com/what-is-critical-race-theory/>

What is conspicuously absent in this definition is the word “worldview.” As Baucham notes, “The million-dollar question is whether CRT is a worldview or merely an analytical tool.”¹³ A worldview is a lens by which people view reality, and as we will discover, there are assumptions that must be accepted to apply the tool. Concerning CRT and intersectionality Albert Mohler, President of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary said in his June 14, 2019 podcast, “They emerged as analytical tools, but they were never merely analytical tools...both CRT and intersectionality are far more than analytical tools.”¹⁴

Key Concepts in the Definition of CRT

The above definition of CRT proposes several key concepts which require further analysis. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic break down these concepts in their book *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*. The first key concept identified is the notion that racism is “ordinary...the usual way society does business.”¹⁵ According to Delgado and Stefancic, racism is “a common everyday experience of people of color.”¹⁶ Rather than racism being an aberration, CRT proponents see it is as typical as breathing air on a daily basis since it is intrinsically woven into the fabric of culture and society. As noted by McWhorter and others, CRT contends that if one is not a minority, he or she participates in systemic racism.

¹³ Baucham, *Fault Lines*, 144.

¹⁴ Mohler, Albert. “Ideas Have Consequences: Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality in the News from the Southern Baptist Convention. Part 3” Produced by The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. *The Briefing*, June 14, 2019. 28:15.

¹⁵ Richard Delgado, Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* (NY: New York University Press, 2017), 8.

¹⁶ Ibid., 8.

Another key concept identified and explained by Delgado and Stefancic is convergence theory, or “material determinism,” which proposes that as, “racism advances the interests of both white elites (materially) and working-class whites (psychically), large segments of society have little incentive to eradicate it.”¹⁷ In essence, what this means is that whites only undo racism when their interests “converge” with minorities.

A third key concept embedded in the CRT statement of UCLA is the notion of truth being socially constructed. What this means as Baucham notes is, “Storytelling/Narrative reading is the way black people forward knowledge vs. the Science Reason method of white people.”¹⁸ In other words, minorities are more competent to speak authoritatively on racism than white people who rely on reason and science instead of narrative. However, in terms of interest convergence, there has been no mention of Christianity as “CRT has failed to develop a substantial literature engaging the law from the perspective of African American Christian tradition.”¹⁹ This is noteworthy because many African Americans are Protestant and the Christian worldview holds a significant place in providing a basis for their ethical structure. Brandon Paradise notes in the 2002 book, *Crossroads, Directions, and a New Critical Race Theory*, that of its nineteen articles, “none focus on the intersection of race, law and Christianity.”²⁰ The evidence reveals CRT’s deep interest, almost religious-like faith in a *certain* narrative that is at best uninterested in *biblical* Christianity and at worst, hostile to it. Nonetheless, some Christians argue there are ways in which the

¹⁷ Ibid., 9.

¹⁸ Baucham, *Fault Lines*, xvi.

¹⁹ Brandon Paradise, 2014. “How Critical Race Theory Marginalizes the African American Christian Tradition.” *Michigan Journal of Race & Law* 20 (1): 121. <https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.biola.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edshol&AN=edshol.hein.journals.mjrl20.7&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

²⁰ Ibid., 122.

church can use CRT. In the spirit of Christian charity and a love for truth, these arguments will now be considered.

Christian Arguments for CRT

The largest Protestant group in the United States is the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). At the 2019 annual gathering, the SBC issued a statement regarding their adoption of CRT. According to *World* magazine the SBC in Resolution 9 noted, CRT is “‘insufficient to diagnose and redress the root causes of social ills’ but also sees them helpful in ‘evaluating a variety of human experiences’ so long as they are ‘only employed as analytical tools subordinate to Scripture-not as transcendent ideological frameworks.’”²¹ In other words, as Scott Smith summarily noted, “CRT can be a useful analytical tool when used in ways to help us discover if racism is at work in a given context.”²² This rationale focuses on how it might be possible for racism to exist in *systems* of a corporate, rather than individual nature. Resolution 9 also states, “Evangelical scholars who affirm the authority and sufficiency of Scripture have employed selective insights from critical race theory to understand multifaceted social dynamics.”²³

Some Christians who favor an implementation of CRT see their critics as being alarmist about something that fails to warrant such a concern. For example, Jemar Tisby noted, “For several years, fundamentalist Christians have positioned CRT as an epithet...It's the theological and ecclesiastical equivalent of the 'Red Scare.' Slap anyone with the label 'Critical Race Theory' and they automatically become enemies of the church.”²⁴ Tisby is not alone in using strong rhetoric

²¹ Sophia Lee. “Southern Baptist Division.” *World* v.36 (3): 47. Feb 13, 2021 <https://search-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.biola.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edb&AN=148843331&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

²² Scott Smith, “Can Critical Theory, and Critical Race Theory, Ground Human Dignity,” 77.

²³ Resolution 9 as quoted in Baucham, *Fault Lines*, 249-250.

²⁴ Jemar Tisby <https://twitter.com/JemarTisby/status/1333948862646595584>

in defense of CRT.²⁵ Yet if the aforementioned tenets are embedded in CRT as a worldview system, or if CRT is a religion at its roots, perhaps this strong rhetoric is misplaced and divisive.

Counter Arguments for Christians to reject CRT

Christians are divided over the possible *limited* use of CRT. First, it should be noted that not all Christians who oppose the possible use of CRT are “fundamentalists” as Jemar Tisby posited. As noted above, the SBC at their meeting endorsed a limited view of the adoption of CRT. Yet, on November 30, 2020 “Six SBC seminary presidents released a statement condemning critical race theory. The statement declared that CRT, intersectionality, and ‘any version of Critical Race Theory’ are ‘incompatible with the Baptist Faith and Message.’”²⁶ I believe the pastors who voted for the implementation of CRT at the convention are sincere in trying to identify racism, but that the seminary presidents’ view towards CRT is correct for three important reasons.

CRT is a Religion

The first reason Christians should reject CRT because it is essentially a religious construct. It uses Christian concepts, but radically redefines them. Concerning CRT being a religion, Carl Trueman notes,

All-embracing and transformative views often have a religious quality. Critical race theory is no exception. It has a creedal language and liturgy, with orthodox words (“white privilege,” “systemic racism”) and prescribed actions (raising the fist, taking the knee). To deviate from the forms is to deviate from the faith. Certain words are heretical (“non-racist,” “all lives matter”). The slogan “silence is violence” is a potent rhetorical weapon. To fail to participate in the liturgy is to reject the antiracism the liturgy purports to represent—something only a racist would do.²⁷

²⁵ The reader is directed to the video series *Fault Lines* as time and space preclude a plethora of citations from these Christians that are dividing the body of Christ along racial lines vehemently advocating for CRT.

²⁶ Ibid., 46-47.

²⁷ Carl Trueman, “Evangelicals and Race Theory,” 21.

Trueman's analysis is by no means exhaustive. For example, one can add the parallels of the “means of atonement (reparations); new birth (wokeness); liturgy (lament); canon (CSJ social science); theologians (DiAngelo, Kendi, Brown, Crenshaw, MacIntosh, etc.), and catechism (say their names).”²⁸ What is missing is *biblical* soteriology. Scanning the pro Christian resources for CRT for this paper, the emphasis that people are sinners before a righteous, holy God was absent. Instead, there was an interest in what one could call “identity politics.”

The reason biblical soteriology is missing is aptly noted in a tweet by Ibram X. Kendi. He said, “And the White savior idea informs what I call ‘savior theology.’ That the job of a Christian is to save all those backward, savage lowly humans. Thank God, I learned liberation theology. That the job of the Christian is to liberate oppressed peoples from their oppression.”²⁹ Kendi elaborates on the distinction between the historic evangelical view of Jesus and the concept of Christ in his book where he notes Tom Skinner, who was raised in an evangelical church, “shared how he came to worship an elite white Jesus.”³⁰ When it comes to soteriology, Kendi and CRT are out of step with Scripture (Matt 1:21) and church history where salvation is deliverance from the power and penalty of *personal* sin through the work of Jesus Christ. And sadly, this emphasis on race permeates the divisive rhetoric of *some* professing Christians who want to implement it. In other words, in many of their works and public speeches, little is said about personal sin and the concept of biblical soteriology. However, Kendi is correct in one sense, Christians should want to see people delivered from oppressive situations, yet nowhere does he

²⁸ Baucham, *Fault Lines*, 67.

²⁹ Ibram X Kendi <https://twitter.com/DrIbram/status/131030676335955587>

³⁰ Ibram X. Kendi, *How To Be an Antiracist* (New York, NY: Random Penguin House, 2019), 15.

acknowledge good examples in church history with examples like Evangelical leaders such as John Newton and William Wilberforce who successfully fought to abolish the slave trade.

Additionally, from a biblical perspective, all worldviews have an anthropological concept of man. For Christians the image of God “is the starting point for understanding every human person.”³¹ The Scriptures emphasize the ontological unity of mankind, rather than racial distinctions. However, CRT groups people according to race which is unbiblical. CRT advocates cannot say, “Whiteness is not evil, white supremacy is.” DiAngelo insists that, “a positive white identity is an impossible goal. White identity is inherently racist; white people do not exist outside the system of white supremacy.”³²

CRT Is Philosophically Inconsistent

Secondly, CRT’s rejection of objective truth is related to the previous point, namely it is a religion that borrows ideas from Christianity. Francis Schaeffer noted that Marxists use Christianity’s “concern for man” as an “individual,” yet this concern could not be rationalized due to their materialism.³³ A materialist has no basis to ground any alleged ethical concern for others as they believe, “the ultimate level of reality, when one gets to the bottom of existence, all is matter.”³⁴ This contradicts the biblical concept regarding the existence of metaphysical, objective truth.

³¹ Owen Strachan, *Christianity and Wokeness: How the Social Justice Movement Is Hijacking the Gospel-and The Way to Stop It* (Washington, DC: Salem Books, 2021), 59.

³² Robin DiAngelo, Michael E. Dyson, *White Fragility* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018), 149-150.

³³ Francis Schaeffer, *The Francis Schaeffer Trilogy: The Three Essential Books in One Volume* (Crossway, 1990), 44 as quoted in Jon Harris, *Christianity and Social Justice: Religions in Conflict* (Ann Arbor, MI: Reformation Zion Publishing, 2021), 25.

³⁴ S. Duffin, “Materialism (Philosophical/Metaphysical)” in *New Dictionary of Christian Apologetics*, 25.

Furthermore, why would a Christian want to consider an ideology which claims to have identified a systemic injustice all the while proclaiming standpoint epistemology?³⁵ In other words, if CRT is going to “find” racism everywhere, then one has to wonder if it is truly there or only existing because it *assumes* it is there. The problem is CRT will *always* find racism in every context. Carl Trueman notes the inconsistency,

Critical race theory, like other critical theories- postcolonialism or queer theory, for example-is self-certifying. Its basic claims for example, that racism is systemic or that being non-racist is impossible, are not conclusions drawn from arguments. They are axioms, and they cannot be challenged by those who do not agree with them. Those who dissent or offer criticism are by definition part of the problem.³⁶

Trueman is correct in that CRT is “self-certifying” without argumentation.

Additionally, the SBC statement is confusing. How is CRT “insufficient to diagnose and redress the *root* causes of social ills” and at the same time a helpful “analytical tool?” If CRT cannot identify the root causes, then how can implementing it as an analytical tool bring a lasting, substantial, *biblical* change of the heart? Jesus identified the *individual* human heart (Matt 15:19) as the source of sin which includes systemic transgressions. Because of its presuppositions, CRT never allows anyone to ask, “Does racism exist in this situation?” Rather, CRT asks, “How is racism actually taking place?”

Greg Koukl noted, “he who makes the claim bears the burden”³⁷ and those who argue for CRT’s usage as an analytical tool have failed to explain in detail (biblically and philosophically) *how* it works with Scripture. Advocates never answer the question

³⁵ Standpoint epistemology argues truth is known solely from one’s social position.

³⁶ Carl Trueman, “Evangelicals and Race Theory,” 20.

³⁷ Greg Koukl, *Tactics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 59.

“What do we gain from employing CRT?” Furthermore, is CRT’s possible implementation only for mature believers, or pastors starting new churches for example in areas where minorities are concentrated? Christians who advocate for the possible use of CRT never say *where, when* or *who* can use it and draw “selective” (to quote Resolution 9) lines, to prevent it from becoming a normal interpretative lens for life.

Sufficiency of Scripture Alone

Moreover, Christians who argue for CRT as an analytical tool fail to address why the Bible alone is insufficient to inform believers regarding identifying systemic sins. The apostle Paul said, “all Scripture is God breathed,” and, “it will *thoroughly equip* the man of God for *every* good work” (2 Tim:3-16-17).³⁸ According to Jay Green, the Greek text here for “thoroughly equip” is the verb *exērtismenos* (ἐξηρτισμένος), and he, along with many other critical sources, render it, “fully furnished.”³⁹ This means church leaders through the ages have always been, and will be “fully furnished” to use Scripture *alone* to identify the sin of partiality or bigotry based on evidence and testimony, to rebuke and correct such attitudes and behaviors and bringing people to repentance.⁴⁰ Those who engage in the sin of partiality, are, “judges with evil motives” (James 2:4).

³⁸ See also 1 Cor 4:6 where the church is instructed “to not go beyond what is written.” This is not an invective against secular knowledge for example, math, science etc. Rather, in terms of *faith and practice* for the Christian the Bible is sufficient for truth, justice, morals, meaning and beauty. Also, note too, that Peter equated Paul’s writings with Scripture (2 Peter 3:15-16) so when 1 Cor 4:6 and 2 Tim 3:16-17 were written, the author and audience believed it to be Scripture.

³⁹ Jay P. Green Sr. *The Interlinear Greek-English New Testament*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 577.

⁴⁰ Church leaders can identify systemic sins without ever referring to CRT. These sins contradict biblical imperatives.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that Christians who are open to the possible use of CRT in the church to help identify systemic sins are genuine in their desire to rectify many social ills that the church has sadly ignored. Scott Smith notes, “CT and CRT can provide a very valuable analytical tool, to help us pay attention to institutional systems, to see if and when oppression is indeed occurring. Nonetheless, I think CT and CRT fail when it comes to making normative moral pronouncements. The theory itself lacks the needed grounding to sustain its many such claims.”⁴¹ I agree the theory lacks the needed grounding to sustain its claims and moreover CRT’s views are only superficially connected to a biblical worldview.

Can we picture biblical authors approving the use of systems that “fail” in terms of coherence and consistency to confront sin?⁴² The key issue in this debate is not whether CRT theorists ever affirm anything *superficially* biblical. Rather, the question is whether any of CRT’s *tenets* are diametrically opposed to Christianity. I have argued this is the case. The concept of, “eat the meat and spit out the bones” is misguided in assuming a proficient ability of Christians, especially new converts, to exercise discernment if considering CRT. As Neil Shenvi contends, “Handing DiAngelo’s *White Fragility* to an unprepared Christian and telling him to ‘eat the meat’ is a bit like handing a basket of cyanide pills to your ten-year-old and telling him ‘there are

⁴¹ Smith, “Can Critical Theory, and Critical Race Theory, Ground Human Dignity,” 82.

⁴² Christianity is the only belief system that can *coherently* hold reality and justice in a single vision. Paraphrase of M.W. Elliot, “Richard Rorty,” *New Dictionary of Christian Apologetics*, 627.

four skittles in there.”⁴³ The Bible alone⁴⁴ has transformed societies for the objective better long before the Frankfurt school came into existence and it will continue to do so until Jesus returns.⁴⁵

⁴³ Neil Shenvi, “Critical Race Theory: Can We Eat the Meat and Spit Out the Bones?” *Journal of Christian Legal Thought* 12, no. 1 (2022), 13. <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=edshol&AN=edshol.hein.journals.jchlet12.7&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

⁴⁴ Col. 2:8 warns the church of being deceived by “philosophy and empty deceit.” This injunction is not saying that *all* philosophy outside of Scripture is false. Rather, it is warning the Christian to stay away from philosophical *systems* that are opposed to Scripture and sadly CRT fits that description. Sometimes Acts 17 where Paul quoted pagan poets is brought up to defend using worldly philosophy. In Acts 17, Paul did quote pagan poets, but he told the Greeks about creation, ex-nihilo (v. 24-28), the fall of man into sin and guilt (v. 30) and redemption through a resurrected Savior (v. 18 &31). And the Greeks in Corinth were informed by Paul (1 Cor 1:21) the world through its philosophy did not know God. In other words, Paul only quoted the pagans where they agreed with Scripture.

⁴⁵ Consider, too, that if something akin to CRT had been adopted by the first century church, would it have prompted the Jews to accuse the non-Jewish brothers and sisters in Christ of being racist, as some were part of an oppressive system rigged against the Jews? The apostle Paul did not call for them to tackle the oppressive system of their day. Nor did he pit one group against the other.