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The Jesus Who Cannot Save:  
Modern American Evangelicalism's Inconsistent Application of Critical Theory

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## THE JESUS WHO CANNOT SAVE

### Abstract

Critical race theory and the broader layman's term "wokeness" have benefitted from attention in news media, social media, and higher education. Critical race theory's Frankfurt School cousin, critical religion theory, however, has received relatively little attention. There seems to be even less attention given to the internal and external consistency of the relationship between these two branches of critical theory. A fresh study or theater for discussion would greatly benefit those invested in either one of these "CRTs."

The modern evangelical movement in America provides such a helpful theater. American evangelical churches and parachurch ministries have tried to balance social charity with exclusive moral truth claims. Pursuing both objectives successfully and simultaneously has resulted in segments of evangelicalism trying to import some principles of Critical Theory while neglecting others. In particular, notable public evangelical influencers have enjoyed the benefits of applying Critical *Race* Theory to their specific ministries while completely ignoring the expectations of Critical *Religion* Theory.

This paper aims to identify the unique voice of this novel segment of American evangelicalism and to provide examples of how this application of Critical Theory is internally inconsistent and also externally inconsistent with the orthodox tenants of evangelicalism. The major unifying tenants of Christian evangelicalism, namely, the authority of Christ, the inerrancy of the Bible, and the exclusivity of Jesus for salvation from sin, are jeopardized by a dance with CRT. The movement betrays both its history as well as the selfsame critical theory it hopes to court and apply.

## THE JESUS WHO CANNOT SAVE

### Introduction

Social justice and critical theory applications have enjoyed a happy partnership within the current cultural zeitgeist. The May 2020 murder of George Floyd and similar tragedies have introduced a fresh conversation on how the privilege of white America intersects with the exercise of police power and the vulnerability of people of color. In addition, a novel voice has entered the conversation, namely, evangelical Christians. With social justice in mind, American evangelical churches and parachurch ministries have tried to balance social charity with exclusive moral truth claims. Pursuing both objectives successfully and simultaneously has resulted in segments of evangelicalism trying to import some principles of Critical Theory while neglecting others. In particular, many public evangelical influencers have enjoyed the benefits of applying Critical *Race* Theory to their specific ministries while completely ignoring the expectations of Critical *Religion* Theory.

This paper aims to identify the voice of this novel segment of American evangelicalism and to provide examples of how this application of Critical Theory is internally inconsistent and also externally inconsistent with the core tenants of evangelicalism. This will be accomplished first by defining the major unifying tenants of Christian evangelicalism and then by critiquing three watershed examples of American Evangelicalism's growing affections toward Critical Race Theory. Finally, this paper will define Critical Religion Theory, point out the inconsistency between it and a Critical-Race-Theory-friendly evangelical presentation of Jesus, and conclude with a brief emphasis on the mutually exclusive relationship between historic evangelicalism and Critical Theory as a whole.

### Critical Race Theory Defined

Critical Race Theory is defined by Encyclopedia Britannica as an “intellectual and social movement and loosely organized framework of legal analysis based on the premise that race is not a natural, biologically grounded feature of physically distinct subgroups of human beings but a socially constructed (culturally invented) category that is used to oppress and exploit people of colour.”<sup>1</sup> Critical Race Theory traces its origins to Critical Legal Studies and from there to Critical Theory itself; thus, Critical Race Theory’s genealogy is marked by a necessarily Marxist understanding of disparities in wealth, power, and influence. To be sure, Critical Theory (including the *Race* and *Religion* branches) emphasizes the value of justice and equality, but because of its definitionally-Marxist-Materialist foundation, any injustice that Critical Theory discovers and attempts to ameliorate is subsumed by anti-biblical applications.

The aspects of Critical Race Theory most germane to the discussion of its presence within modern American evangelicalism are the Marxist expectation of racism’s being “inherent in the law and legal institutions of the United States,”<sup>2</sup> the nature of the resulting inequalities between whites and African Americans, and the materialistic epistemology that defines how proponents understand human experiences. This paper will thus consider how these Marxist expectations and their Critical Religion Theory counterparts, particularly the solution of redistributing wealth, power, and influence, interact with modern American evangelicalism’s dedication to orthodox doctrine, including the authority of the Bible, the lordship of Jesus Christ, and the Christian necessity of trusting him for salvation from sin and obeying his commands.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica, “critical race theory,” Encyclopedia Britannica, August 23, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/critical-race-theory>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> cf. Matthew 28:18-20.

### **American Evangelicalism Defined**

Evangelicalism is a global movement that was originally established within Western Christianity. It is characterized by a common loyalty to particular truth claims about Jesus and the Bible as well as by unique pursuits of the common good. Minimally, the truth claims of American evangelicals are that the words of the original autographs of what is today known as the Bible are divinely inspired by a Triune God, are completely without error, and are the final rule and authority for genuine faith and practice (these truth claims are encapsulated in the theological terms inspiration, Trinity, Monotheism, inerrancy, and biblical authority, respectively). They also typically insist upon sin as a universal problem, including that every individual is personally guilty of breaking God's law and stands justly accused before God. So, everyone is in need of a Savior, and salvation only comes by placing one's faith in Jesus Christ as their substitute, the One who died on the cross for them and rose from the dead three days later in triumph over sin and death.

Socially, evangelicals have traditionally avoided the promotion of government welfare programs in favor of the establishment of their own charitable organizations, including city rescue missions, hospitals, orphanages, schools, and camps. White evangelicals have overwhelmingly supported Republican candidates and lean conservative in their view of government oversight and policy.<sup>4</sup> The divide in the last couple decades has grown particularly stark as liberal policies that defy an evangelical application of the Bible grow more prevalent, especially as it concerns homosexual marriage, transgender activism, and abortion access.

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<sup>4</sup> Frank Newport, "Religious Group Voting and the 2020 Election," Gallup.com (Gallup, November 13, 2020), last modified November 13, 2020, accessed December 2022, <https://news.gallup.com/opinion/polling-matters/324410/religious-group-voting-2020-election.aspx>.

## **Critical Theory and the American Evangelical Church**

The aforementioned evangelical systems of belief and social activity are thoroughly conservative, but the modern evangelical movement in America has seen marked fluctuations in consistency relative to Critical Race Theory and, by proxy, Critical Religion Theory. Three concrete and helpful examples will be considered here:

### **The Southern Baptist Convention**

The Southern Baptist Convention (SBC), America's largest Protestant denomination with a membership of over thirteen million people, experienced several transformations in the mid to late twentieth century. Division that began around the 1960s eventually manifested in the form of several SBC churches embracing or at least tolerating female pastors and less-than-inspired and inerrant views of the Bible — a major shift for the historically-conservative convention. This division caused an identity crisis that was abruptly reversed in the late 1970s through early 1990s in a period known as the Conservative Resurgence.

The SBC has consistently and repeatedly apologized for their treatment of African Americans and a support of slavery that had marred their origins. They have even pursued avenues of financial support for people of color, including special scholarships for their seminaries and a variety of charitable projects. It was inevitable, then, that the SBC would eventually have to reckon with Critical Theory.

The nearly 50,000 churches and six seminaries of the SBC are profoundly divided over Critical Theory, especially the subset of Critical Race Theory. A historic moment for the evangelical denomination came in 2019 when the Resolutions Committee completely flipped an anti-critical-race-theory proposal and presented it to the Convention in a reworded form that is ultimately in support of Critical Race Theory, describing it as a “set of analytical tools that

explain how race has and continues to function in society.”<sup>5</sup> Dr. Curtis Woods, chairman of the Resolutions Committee and former Professor of Applied Theology and Biblical Spirituality at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, responded to criticism from the floor at the time this “Resolution 9” was presented by saying, “Critical Race Theory and intersectionality are *simply* analytical tools that are meant to be used as tools, not as a worldview...and can be utilized *simply* as an analytical tool, not a transcendent worldview above the authority of Scripture” (emphasis mine).<sup>6</sup>

This use of the word “simply” betrays a significant divide in the thinking of the SBC and thus American evangelicalism as a whole. There was considerable pushback from various pastors and ministry leaders who vocalized their concerns from the floor and insisted that CRT cannot be applied without importing some of its fundamentally anti-evangelical philosophy. Enough SBC representatives trusted the Resolutions Committee’s assurances, however, and Resolution 9 passed. Vocal SBC pastors and ministry leaders on both sides of the issue continue to question the consistency of the SBC’s identity and how to define unity among SBC churches.

### **Jamar Tisby and Grove City College**

Another key positive influencer toward Critical Race Theory in American evangelicalism is African-American author and historian Jamar Tisby: “In 2011, I moved from being teacher to student when I enrolled in Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson, Mississippi to earn my

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<sup>5</sup> Resolutions Committee, “On Critical Race Theory and Intersectionality,” SBC.net, last modified June 1, 2019, accessed December 2022, <https://www.sbc.net/resource-library/resolutions/on-critical-race-theory-and-intersectionality>.

<sup>6</sup> “SBC19 - Committee on Resolutions Report - Wednesday Afternoon,” YouTube, 2022, uploaded June 29, 2022, accessed December 2022, <https://youtu.be/SbKOGUoaLhI>.

Master of Divinity degree... While at RTS, I came ‘under care’ in the Presbyterian Church of America (PCA) and worked at an intentionally multi-racial Presbyterian church.”<sup>7</sup>

After feeling disconnected from and unsupported by the PCA, Tisby applied to the newly-developed PhD in Ethics and Public Theology program at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. Before he knew he was even accepted into the program, Tisby was publicly announced as the first future graduate of this specific PhD program. This announcement and other events led Tisby to feel further tokenized, and so he left the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and completed his doctorate at the University of Mississippi.<sup>8</sup>

Tisby had a unique and short-lived relationship with Grove City College, a historically conservative Christian college in Northwest Pennsylvania. Tisby came as an invited guest in October 2020 and spoke in a religious chapel worship service on “parallels between the biblical story of Esther and the modern-day movement for racial justice.”<sup>9</sup> In early 2022, after various families and supporters of the college complained about Tisby and other manifest examples of Critical Theory on campus, an investigative panel concluded that “[Most of those in GCC leadership] allow that, in hindsight, inviting Mr. Tisby to speak in chapel was a mistake.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Jemar Tisby, “A Tale of Two Tables,” Jemar Tisby, accessed January 14, 2023, <https://jemartisby.com/about/>.

<sup>8</sup> Jemar Tisby and Tyler Burns, Pass the Mic podcast, The Witness BCC, “Leave LOUD: Jemar Tisby’s Story,” uploaded March 8, 2021, accessed January 2023, <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/leave-loud-jemar-tisbys-story/id1435500798?i=1000512038741>.

<sup>9</sup> Kathryn Post, “Grove City College Condemns ‘Alleged Drift into CRT Advocacy,’” Christianity Today (Christianity Today, April 25, 2022), last modified April 25, 2022, accessed January 14, 2023, <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2022/april/grove-city-college-critical-race-theory-crt-jemar-tisby-rep.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Grove City College ad hoc Special Committee, “Report and Recommendation of the Special Committee,” Grove City College (Grove City College, April 13, 2022), last modified April 13, 2022, accessed January 14, 2023, [https://www.gcc.edu/Portals/0/Special-Committee-Report-and-Recommendation\\_0422.pdf](https://www.gcc.edu/Portals/0/Special-Committee-Report-and-Recommendation_0422.pdf).



Tisby was subsequently interviewed by the sympathetic Ed Stetzer, Executive Director of the Billy Graham Center at Wheaton College and host of the Stetzer Church Leaders Podcast.<sup>11</sup> Grove City College's belated rejection and Ed Stetzer's support signal a unique divide among evangelicals, and that divide grows even more stark given Tisby's recent activity, including a supportive interview with Rev. Dr. Jaqui Lewis,<sup>12</sup> who vocally validates homosexuality as a lifestyle and pursuit in line with Christian thinking.<sup>13</sup>

### **Moody Bible Institute and Eric Mason's *Woke Church***

Another watershed moment in American evangelicalism came through Moody Bible Institute of Chicago and its media and publishing arms, Moody Radio and Moody Publishers, respectively. In early 2018, a Moody Radio talk show host became a whistleblower and lost her job after publicizing incriminating details about Moody Bible Institute's leadership.<sup>14</sup> The following day, the Institute's President and COO resigned, and the provost announced his retirement.

Institutional change signaled a like kind of ideological change. As the Bible institute was trying to recover from this volatile leadership overhaul, the Moody publishing arm released a

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<sup>11</sup> Ed Stetzer and Jemar Tisby, the Stetzer Church Leaders Podcast, Church Leaders, "Jemar Tisby on Grove City College, CRT, and His Struggles With White Evangelicalism," uploaded June 1, 2022, accessed January 14, 2023, <https://churchleaders.com/podcast/425762-jemar-tisby-grove-city-college-crt-white-evangelicalism.html>.

<sup>12</sup> Jemar Tisby and Jaqui Lewis, Footnotes with Jemar Tisby podcast, "Those Meddling Kids: A Pastoral Response to the Anti-CRT Crusade w/ Rev. Dr. Jacqui Lewis," uploaded September 2, 2022, accessed January, 2023, <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/those-meddling-kids-a-pastoral-response-to-the-anti/id1460240056?i=1000578130234>.

<sup>13</sup> Jacqui Lewis, Twitter Post, March 3, 2020, 9:36 AM, accessed January 2023, <https://twitter.com/revjacquilewis/status/1234850165451894798?lang=en>.

<sup>14</sup> Julie Roys, "A Luxury Suite, Questionable Loan to Officer, & Gambling: The Disturbing Truth about Leadership at MBI," The Roys Report, last modified January 24, 2018, accessed December 2022, <https://julieroys.com/luxury-suite-questionable-loans-officers-gambling-shocking-truth-leadership-mbi/>

book that is equally as controversial but profoundly more transparent in its intentions—*Woke Church* by Eric Mason. Mason is the pastor of Epiphany Fellowship Church in Philadelphia, PA, and a graduate of two evangelical seminaries, Dallas Theological Seminary and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary. Breaking from a conservative biblical understanding of sanctification (i.e. that which is required for a Christian to be separated from the sinful world and attached relationally to God), Mason implies that Christian love must necessarily include an acknowledgement of “being socially aware of issues that have systemic impact”<sup>15</sup> as well as the “double consciousness of black people”<sup>16</sup> as described by W.E.B. Du Bois.

Mason likewise betrays sympathy with a Critical-Race-Theory-friendly understanding of race relations in his evaluation of the causes of high abortion rates among black women in America, suggesting that a primary cause is poor socio-economic conditions created by white people: “What nerve to say that w/ the history [whites] deny that created the environment for mass abortions in the AA community.”<sup>17</sup>

### **Critical Religion Theory**

The expectations of Critical Religion Theory represent a crucial consideration that is missing from both sides of the evangelical divide. More commonly known as the Critical Theory of Religion, this branch of critical theory is not as well developed, or at least not as popular, as Critical Race Theory. Critical Race Theory has drawn popular energy from its legal origins and

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<sup>15</sup> Eric Mason, *Woke Church: An Urgent Call for Christians in America to Confront Racism and Injustice* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2018), 25.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>17</sup> Eric Mason, Twitter Post, February 9, 2019, 2:16 PM, accessed January 2023, <https://twitter.com/pastoremase/status/1094314128934662150>.

its related application to perceived injustice among peoples of color,<sup>18</sup> while Critical Religion Theory has suffered from a much less “marketable” development.

Dr. Rudolf Siebert, retired professor and chair for the Department of Comparative Religion at Western Michigan University, was the tip of the spear for the religious branch of critical theory in the latter half of the twentieth century.<sup>19</sup> While not fleshed-out in depth in the classroom, the presence of religious affiliations nonetheless show up in various lists of privileges. For example, in 2015 a 600-page manual used by the U.S. Air Force to train Equal Opportunity officers listed “Christian” alongside “healthy,” “white,” and “heterosexual” and described it as something that provides an unfair advantage.<sup>20</sup> Much like “wokeness” is a “man on the street” term that references Critical Race Theory, Critical Religion Theory finds its most practical discourse in the term “*Christian privilege*—the conscious and subconscious advantages often afforded the Christian faith.”<sup>21</sup>

Critical Religion Theory is marked by at least three particular characteristics: Marxism, humanism, and a utopian eschatology. Concerning Marxism, Critical Religion Theory traces its

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<sup>18</sup> Douglas Groothuis, “Critical Race Theory and the Christian Worldview,” Evangelical Theological Society Annual Meeting 2022 (Denver, CO, November 17, 2022), 1.

<sup>19</sup> Kathleen Refior, “Beloved WMU religion and society professor retires after a more than five-decade career,” Western Michigan University, last modified December 3, 2019, accessed December 2022, <https://wmich.edu/arts-sciences/siebert>.

<sup>20</sup> Todd Starnes, “Pentagon Training Manual: White Males Have Unfair Advantages,” Fox News (FOX News Network, September 30, 2015), last modified September 30, 2015, accessed January 2023, <https://www.foxnews.com/opinion/pentagon-training-manual-white-males-have-unfair-advantages>.

<sup>21</sup> Tricia Seifert, “Understanding Christian Privilege: Managing the Tensions of Spiritual Plurality,” Wayback Machine (About Campus, May-June 2007), accessed December 2022, [https://web.archive.org/web/20120530161350/http://www.education.uiowa.edu/centers/Libraries/CRUE\\_Documents/About\\_Campus\\_12\\_2.sflb.ashx](https://web.archive.org/web/20120530161350/http://www.education.uiowa.edu/centers/Libraries/CRUE_Documents/About_Campus_12_2.sflb.ashx), 11.

origins to Critical Theory itself, specifically, Max Horkheimer and the Frankfurt school, who used Marx and his Hegelian dialectic in the formation of their philosophies.<sup>22</sup>

The humanistic quality of Critical Religion theory is evident in its focus and goals, namely, the redistribution of wealth, power, and influence from the most powerful and privileged to those who are less so. To this end, Marsha Hewitt sees religion as “an emancipatory force,”<sup>23</sup> and Siebert advocates for a “Christology from below”<sup>24</sup> that focuses on Jesus as a poor man that the rich killed, to borrow wording from Marx,<sup>25</sup> rather than a “Christology from above” that emphasizes the evangelical doctrines of the Trinity and the deity and authority of Christ. The dismissal of theism is likewise found throughout Horkheimer’s understanding of religion’s best use, “pragmatic” and “functional.”<sup>26</sup>

The utopian future vision of Critical Religion Theory seems to have a near-ubiquitous appearance in all the literature of its proponents. Rolan Boer speaks of an anti-secular focus of Marx that looks ahead to “a world to come, an age beyond this one which will, one hopes, be better in some way.”<sup>27</sup> Hewitt submits that Frankfurt School theorists and feminist liberation theologians and theorists have in common “a utopian commitment to the realization...of a more

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<sup>22</sup> Rudolf J. Siebert, “Foundations of the Critical Theory of Religion,” YouTube, Moondog Films, 2013, accessed December 2022, <https://youtu.be/Wkd3IjxKBpQ>.

<sup>23</sup> Marsha Aileen Hewitt, *Critical Theory of Religion: A Feminist Analysis* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1995), ix.

<sup>24</sup> Siebert, “Foundations of the Critical Theory of Religion.”

<sup>25</sup> Rudolf J. Siebert, Michael R. Ott, and Dustin J. Byrd, “The Critical Theory of Religion: From Having to Being” (2013), Grand Valley State University Scholar Works, Peer Reviewed Articles, 2, [https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/soc\\_articles/2](https://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/soc_articles/2), 38.

<sup>26</sup> Michael R. Ott, *Max Horkheimer's Critical Theory of Religion: The Meaning of Religion in the Struggle for Human Emancipation* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2001), 21.

<sup>27</sup> Roland Boer, *Criticism of Religion: On Marxism and Theology, II*, vol. 22 (Boston: Brill, 2009), 251.

human world.”<sup>28</sup> And Siebert, Ott, and Byrd look to a “realm of freedom as creative realization of all human potentials and powers—eye, ear, memory, intellect, will, etc., and as full being, beyond the realm of natural and economic necessity.”<sup>29</sup> To be sure, evangelical theology is likewise eschatological. However, Critical Religion Theory relegates religion to a pragmatic role, a means to an end rather than as shared beliefs involving absolute truth claims that need to be consistently reconciled.

### **Inconsistencies in Modern Evangelical America’s application of Critical Theory**

At least three biblical evangelical principles are jeopardized by Critical Race Theory and Critical Religion Theory. Both Critical Race Theory and Critical Religion Theory have a commitment to materialism (as opposed to evangelicalism’s dependence on revelation from God) and to a promotion of the ongoing forcible redistribution of wealth, power, and influence as a long-term solution to inequality. Any meaningful evangelical application will result in the importation of foreign expectations mutually exclusive to that which makes evangelicalism a distinctly biblical religious and cultural movement. Thus, any long-term meaningful evangelical application would eventually render the user non-evangelical. Consider how Critical Race Theory and Critical Religion Theory jeopardize these three foundational evangelical principles:

#### **Exclusivity of Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord**

Evangelicals believe that the Triune God is sovereign and that Jesus, as a person of this Triune Godhead, is God: “Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says ‘Jesus is accursed!’ and no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except in the Holy

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<sup>28</sup> Hewitt, x.

<sup>29</sup> Siebert, Ott, and Byrd, 35.

Spirit” (1 Corinthians 12:3, ESV).<sup>30</sup> Christians also recognize that Jesus’ resurrection validates the sufficiency of His sacrifice on the cross as well as establishes His preeminence over all created things, including both the Church and secular authorities:

“For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent” (Colossians 1:16-18).

Colossians 1 and 2 connect this authority to Jesus’s divinity, with the latter including these words to believers: “In him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.” (2:9-10). To say that Jesus is Lord and that He is King of Kings is indeed to make political statements and requires that the hearer give up on trying to conceive or promote any version of religion, morality, or society over which Jesus is not king.

Moreover, evangelicals believe that faith in Jesus Christ is a necessity for anyone to be saved from their sin.<sup>31</sup> It is inconsistent to spend one moment telling African Americans, for example, that reparations (i.e. the forcible redistribution of wealth) are biblical and justified because of harm their ancestors suffered in the past<sup>32</sup> yet spend another moment telling that same audience that they must confess Jesus as Lord despite the fact that, according to Critical Religion

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<sup>30</sup> Paul P. Enns, *The Moody Handbook of Theology* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2008), 648 (See also Romans 10:9 and Philippians 2:11).

<sup>31</sup> Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Basic Theology: A Popular Systemic Guide to Understanding Biblical Truth* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 281 (See also Acts 4:12).

<sup>32</sup> Thabiti Anyabwile, “Reparations Are Biblical,” The Gospel Coalition, last modified October 10, 2019, accessed December 2022, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/thabiti-anyabwile/reparations-are-biblical/>.

Theory, Christian privilege permitted countless Christians, slave owners and otherwise, to exploit the poor in the name of this same Jesus.

### **The Nature of Reconciliation**

Because evangelicals believe salvation is by grace through faith in Christ alone, they also believe that faith in Christ and His subsequent salvation are all that is required for ultimate reconciliation between brothers and sisters in Christ, no matter their race, ethnicity, or subjective feelings. “The Statement on Social Justice and the Gospel,” a response to so-called woke Christianity and whose initial signers include John MacArthur, Voddie Baucham, and Tom Ascol, helpfully draws the distinction between saving faith and political activism: “WE DENY that political or social activism should be viewed as integral components of the gospel or primary to the mission of the church. Though believers can and should utilize all lawful means that God has providentially established to have some effect on the laws of a society, we deny that these activities are either evidence of saving faith or constitute a central part of the church’s mission given to her by Jesus Christ, her head.”<sup>33</sup> Consider also the definitional statement of Colossians 3:11: “Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.”

If the blood of Christ pays for an individual Christian’s sins and reconciles them to God<sup>34</sup>, then nothing more is required to be reconciled to another Christian they might have oppressed in the past. Evangelical theology is not necessarily compromised by social action per

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<sup>33</sup> “The Statement on Social Justice and the Gospel,” last modified September 4, 2018, accessed December 2022, <https://statementonsocialjustice.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/SSJG-FINAL.pdf>, 4.

<sup>34</sup> Romans 5:1; 8:1.

se, but one ceases to be evangelical (and begins to be dangerously legalistic) the moment they insinuate that large donations of money, the dismantling of Confederate statues<sup>35</sup>, and other subjectively-based standards are *necessary* enterprises for the Church or a requirement for reconciliation between Christians.

### **Authority of the Bible**

For a Critical-Theory-friendly evangelical to call upon an oppressed class to submit to the authority of Scripture is inconsistent. They would be handling mutually exclusive epistemologies.

Evangelicals depend on revelatory epistemology, specifically, that the original autographs of the Bible are inerrant, inspired, and authoritative.<sup>36</sup> This means that God is knowable and has revealed Himself to man through the written Word.<sup>37</sup> Critical Race Theory and Critical Religion Theory lose their identity if their epistemology is removed, that is, standpoint epistemology<sup>38</sup> and a mixed humanistic, materialistic epistemology<sup>39</sup>, respectively.

The roots of standpoint epistemology are addressed in Scripture. Indeed, when there were evil days in the Old Testament it was said, “Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”<sup>40</sup> Likewise, “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death.”<sup>41</sup> To claim

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<sup>35</sup> Jemar Tisby, *The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019), 197-201.

<sup>36</sup> Enns, 648.

<sup>37</sup> Ryrie, 27.

<sup>38</sup> Groothuis, 2-3.

<sup>39</sup> Rudolf J. Siebert, *The Critical Theory of Religion the Frankfurt School: From Universal Pragmatic to Political Theology* (Berlin: Mouton Publishers, 1985), 147-148.

<sup>40</sup> Judges 21:25.

<sup>41</sup> Proverbs 14:12.



that an experience is true simply because it is “my story” or “my experience” and then make sweeping moral judgments and expect some form of commensurate reparation as definitional to Christian charity is simply a regurgitated form of this Old Testament evil. Moreover, by its very existence and general claims, Scripture and humanistic, materialistic epistemology are mutually exclusive.

One who would promote Critical Race Theory as “simply an analytical tool” ignores the reality that the epistemological expectations of evangelical Christianity depend on the Bible as completely authoritative.<sup>42</sup> Critical Race Theory denies the authority of written revelation at the expense of someone’s personal experience (i.e. standpoint epistemology), and Critical Religion Theory declares that revelation is only as valuable as its capacity to advance society toward the utopian vision. Indeed, he or she would be vacillating between authorities and epistemologies and thus simultaneously invalidating both Critical Theory and evangelical Christianity.

### **Conclusion: All or Nothing**

Both evangelicals and non-evangelicals would benefit from an examination of Critical Religion Theory and its relationship to the importation of Critical Race Theory into modern American evangelicalism. If Critical Race Theory and Critical Religion Theory are more consistent with one another than evangelical Christianity is with either of them, then evangelical Christianity would have to transform its fundamental beliefs in order to work in sync with Critical Theory, not the other way around. In fact, Critical Theory is more apt to thrive on internal inconsistency, as its subjectively-based standpoint epistemology permits a focus on the utopian vision accomplished through the redistribution of wealth, power, and influence often at

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<sup>42</sup> 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

the expense of objectivity.<sup>43</sup> Conversely, the identity of evangelicalism depends on an objective reliance on the authority of the Bible and an unsullied proclamation of the gospel, that Jesus and His rule, both present and future, are the only hope for the lost sinner.

### **Recommended Resources for Further Study**

Founders Ministries. *By What Standard? YouTube*, 2023. Uploaded June 8, 2020. Accessed July 2023. <https://youtu.be/pFHfa0s1XLM>

Groothuis, Douglas. "Critical Race Theory and the Christian Worldview." Paper presented at the Evangelical Theological Society Annual Meeting 2022 in Denver, CO, November 17, 2022.

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<sup>43</sup> Laurie Rubel, Twitter Post, April 23, 2022, 9:40 AM, accessed January 2023, (on the subjectivity/objectivity of "2+2=4"), [https://twitter.com/laurie\\_rubel/status/1517860843484073985](https://twitter.com/laurie_rubel/status/1517860843484073985).

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