

JOURNAL *of* CHRISTIAN LEGAL THOUGHT

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Christian Legal Society (CLS), founded in 1961, seeks to glorify God by inspiring, encouraging, and equipping Christian attorneys and law students, both individually and in community, to proclaim, love, and serve Jesus Christ through the study and practice of law, through the provision of legal assistance to the poor and needy, and through the defense of the inalienable rights to life and religious freedom.

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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The mission of the *Journal of Christian Legal Thought* is to equip and encourage legal professionals to seek and study biblical truth as it relates to law, the practice of law, and legal institutions.

Theological reflection on the law, an attorney's work, and legal institutions is central to an attorney's calling; therefore, all Christian attorneys and law students have an obligation to consider the nature and purpose of human law, its sources and development, and its relationship to the revealed will of God — as well as the practical implications of the Christian faith for their daily work. The *Journal* exists to help practicing attorneys, law students, judges, and legal scholars engage in this theological and practical reflection, both as a professional community and as individuals. In short, it seeks to guide the Christian community in the interaction of law, religion, and practice. Not only for the sake of thinking well — but also doing well — in our daily struggle to love God and neighbor.

How does the *Journal* intend to accomplish this?

First, by providing practitioners and students a vehicle through which to engage Christian legal scholarship that will enhance this interaction as it relates to their daily work. Second, by providing legal scholars a peer-reviewed medium through which to explore the law in light of Scripture, under the broad influence of the doctrines and creeds of the Christian faith, and on the shoulders of the communion of saints across the ages. Lastly, by offering timely content that speaks to the dynamics of cultural change and the varying needs across diverse communities.

Given the depth and sophistication of so much of the best Christian legal scholarship today, the *Journal* recognizes that sometimes these three purposes will be at odds. While the *Journal* will maintain a relatively consistent point of contact with the concerns of practitioners, it will also seek to engage intra-scholarly debates, welcome inter-disciplinary scholarship, and encourage innovative scholarly input. The *Journal* seeks to be a forum where complex issues may be discussed and debated — reflective of the changes in society and the epistemic concerns raised by Pontius Pilate: "*Quid est veritas?*" (John 18:37-38).

EDITORIAL POLICY

The *Journal* seeks original scholarly articles addressing the integration of the Christian faith and legal study or practice, broadly understood, including the influence of Christianity on law, the relationship between law and Christianity, and the role of faith in the attorney's work. Articles should reflect a Christian perspective and consider Scripture an authoritative source of revealed truth. Protestant, Roman Catholic, and Orthodox perspectives are welcome as within the broad stream of Christianity.

Articles and essays do not, however, necessarily reflect the views of Christian Legal Society or other sponsoring institutions or individuals.

To submit articles or suggestions for the *Journal*, send a query or suggestion to Christian Legal Society at lsm@clsnet.org.



THE CHRISTIAN KULTERKAMPF

Is Culture War Our Call?

BY THADDEUS J. WILLIAMS

On January 17, 1873, the German parliamentarian Rudolf Virchow, speaking before the Prussian house of representatives, first introduced a word that has since become a defining mark of Western societies, with increasing frequency over the last fifty years. Virchow coined the German term *Kulturkampf*, literally translated as “culture struggle” or, in its more popular iteration today, “culture war.”

In its historical context, Otto von Bismarck, then Chancellor of the German Empire, sought to enforce secular state power over and against the enduring political and social influence of the Catholic Church. *Kulturkampf* became a descriptor for a series of Bismarck’s heavy-handed policies—government oversight of religious schools, the purging of religious teachers from government schools, state regulation of clergy employment, the banning of Jesuits from German territories, the legislated power-shift of marriage from a church-sanctioned to a mandatory civil/government sanctioned institution, and even the imprisonment and exile of hundreds of priests whom the government deemed a threat to its imperialist agenda. (We are not hard pressed to find parallels within Western cultures in the 2020s, particularly in the strained relations between secular state authorities and churches in Canada, the United States, and Australia – tensions exacerbated by the Covid pandemic.)

In the second half of the twentieth century, the *Kulturkampf* or “culture war” motif began to take on new semantic shapes in America. While controversies we would now readily identify as frontline “culture war” disputes had already been taking shape from the sixties through the eighties, it was 1991 when University of Virginia sociologist James Davidson Hunter helped introduce “culture war” into the mainstream American lexicon with the publication of *Culture Wars: The*

Struggle to Define America. In 1992, Republican presidential candidate Pat Buchanan highlighted “culture war” language throughout his keynote speech at the Republican National Convention. In 1994, evangelical theologian Michael Horton released *Beyond Culture Wars: Is America a Mission Field or Battlefield?*, questioning the growing culture war motif that had been sweeping through Christian subculture. Horton articulates the kind of theological critique of culture war that this article will attempt to advance.

By the twenty-first century, the term “culture war” has become part of the *lingua franca* in Western countries and marks political and social commentary from across the political spectrum. Charged “culture war” language can be heard on CNN or Fox News, the *Daily Wire* or *Slate*, *The Onion* or *The Babylon Bee*.

In evangelical Christian circles, culture war language is often deployed to forge a noble collective identity as God’s courageous, moral infantry doing battle against “liberals,” “Marxists,” “social justice warriors,” and other Leftist combatants. Listen with tuned ears to Christian radio, Christian literature, Christian blogs, and Christian conversations, and it becomes clear: Christians love warfare language. Over the last thirty years it has become our dominant metaphor for relating to the broader culture, often to the chagrin of Millennials and Gen Z. But is culture war our call? Is it biblical? Are our legal callings best framed in terms of *Kulturkampf*?

Over the last thirty years it has become our dominant metaphor for relating to the broader culture, often to the chagrin of Millennials and Gen Z. But is culture war our call? Is it biblical?

THE ANTI-TRINITY

I offer two friendly critiques of Christian *Kulturkampf*. First, *culture war blurs important biblical distinctions regarding evil, moving us to battle the wrong “enemy.”* What if the Allies of World War II had declared war against Holland, marching on the Hague to dethrone Queen Wilhelmina,

while the rampaging Fuhrer of Berlin continued his vicious Blitzkrieg unopposed? Such a witless Allied blunder would have been cataclysmic. As Sun Tzu observed in *The Art of War*, you must “know your enemy.”

When looking through biblical lenses, we see evil not in monochrome, but in three dark hues. We behold what we might call an “anti-Trinity” of forces ambushing the triune God’s good mission for his universe. In the Trinity we have God, the Father of Lights; in the anti-Trinity, the Devil, who is the Father of Lies. In the Trinity we find Jesus, the Word made flesh; in the anti-Trinity, we encounter our internal sin drive, which Paul calls “the flesh” (*sarx*). In the Trinity we meet the Holy Spirit, called the Spirit of Truth; in the anti-Trinity, the world, or “the spirit of the age.” These important distinctions are captured in the following infographic:

“The life of a Christian, it is true, is a perpetual warfare, for whoever gives himself to the service of God will have no truce from Satan at any time.”¹

Should we war against the flesh, those internal anti-God propensities that “wage war against your soul” (1 Pet. 2:11), “making me captive to the law of sin” (Rom. 7:23)? Again, the Bible issues a call to war: “Put on the armor of light . . . [and] put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires” (Rom. 13:12, 14). With violent language, Paul calls us to “put to death” the flesh by the Holy Spirit’s power, to execute or “crucify” it (Rom. 8:13 and Gal. 5:16–24).

Is Christianity a religion of warfare? If our enemies are the flesh and the Devil, then, yes, onward Christian soldiers! If, however, our enemy is the world, then the Bible strikes a very different tone. First, we are com-

THE TRINITY		THE ANTI-TRINITY	
THE FATHER	<i>“The Father of Lights”</i>	<i>“The Father of Lies”</i>	THE DEVIL
JAM. 1:17 EPH. 4:6 1 PET. 1:3 MATT. 5:45 JN. 4:23 JN. 10:29-38	The Father is God, “the Father of Lights” on a redemptive mission in the world for His glory’s sake. Narrow focus on this truth may lead theologically to Arianism and a practical failure to worship and enjoy the Son and the Holy Spirit.	The Devil is evil, “the Father of Lies” on a destructive mission in the world for his glory’s sake. Narrow focus on this truth may lead to blaming self-caused blunders on the devil and often unhealthy obsession with/fear of demons.	JN. 8:44 1 PET. 5:8 JN. 17:15 EPH. 6:10-16 JN. 10:10 JAM. 4:7
THE SON	<i>God Who “Became Flesh”</i>	<i>“The Flesh”</i>	THE SIN NATURE
JN. 1:1, 14 ISA. 9:6-7 HEB. 1:3-13 COL. 1:15-17 ROM. 9:5 JN. 20:28	The Son is God who “became flesh,” lived flawlessly, died as our substitute, and rose bodily to give us life. Narrow focus on this truth may lead to “Jesus Only” theology and a practical failure to worship and enjoy the Father and Holy Spirit.	The Sin Nature is evil, “the flesh” as an internal driving force toward selfish action and away from God, leading to death. Narrow focus on this truth may lead to morbid introspection and ignoring the need for spiritual warfare.	ROM. 8:11-17 GAL. 5:16-25 PS. 51:1-12 1 PET. 2:11 COL. 3:5-10 MATT. 15:8-20
THE HOLY SPIRIT	<i>“The Spirit of Truth”</i>	<i>“The Spirit of the Age”</i>	THE WORLD
JN. 14:16-17 EZ. 36:26-27 AC. 5:3-9 2 PET. 1:21 GAL. 5:22-23 JN. 16:13-14	The Holy Spirit is God, “the Spirit of Truth” who moves people deeper into the reality of God and His glory. Narrow focus on this truth may lead to “Charisma” and a practical failure to worship and enjoy the Father and the Son.	The World is evil, “the spirit of the age” that moves people deeper into the illusion of our own godhood and glory. Narrow focus on this truth may lead to an us-them xenophobia and failure to acknowledge/fight against internal evils.	1 COR. 2:12 ROM. 12:2 JAM. 4:4 TIT. 2:12 1 JN. 2:15-17 EPH. 2:1-5

“NOTHING IS SO EFFECTUAL AGAINST THE WORLD, THE FLESH, AND THE DEVIL AS TO BE OCCUPIED WITH GOD’S WORD.”
Martin Luther

Biblical distinctions between the world, the flesh, and the Devil are massively important to the question of whether we should engage in culture war. Should we war against the Devil? Yes. Paul calls us to prayerfully armor up “against the schemes of the devil” and “extinguish all the flaming darts of the evil one,” wielding the Word of God to assault God’s ancient enemy (Eph. 6:10–20). As Calvin put it in his commentary on 2 Corinthians 10,

missioned not to live in a tribalized bubble, but to go into the world to herald the good news of Jesus (Matt. 28:19). Second, we don’t go as chameleons absorbing into our skin any Christless colors of the broader culture but as nonconformists, unstained from the world, shining as lights in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation (Rom. 12:2; Jam. 1:27; and Phil. 2:15). We refuse to become slaves, victims, friends, or lovers of an

¹ 2 JOHN CALVIN, BIBLE COMMENTARIES ON ST. PAUL’S FIRST EPISTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS 194 (Pringle trans. 2017).

oppressive system in which greedy consumption, radical self-glorification, and constant pleasure-center brain stimulation are hailed as virtues (See Gal. 4:9; 6:14; Jam. 4:2–4; and 1 Jn. 2:16–17). Third, as we go, the Bible warns that the world might very well take an aggressive posture of hatred toward those who refuse to conform to its values (See Jn. 15:18–19 and Matt. 10:22, 25).

When the hatred comes, should Christians beat our plowshares into swords and counterattack with culture war? On the contrary, Jesus commands (not suggests) not that we retaliate or even merely tolerate but that we “love our enemies” (Lk. 6:27, 35). Jesus prayed for the salvation of the very men hammering spikes through his wrists and bled for us when we ourselves were warring against the Father he loves. Paul, following this radical countercultural pattern of enemy-love (and no stranger to the world’s brutality himself), commands blessing to the persecutor, peaceable living with all, a ban on vengeance, food for the hungry enemy, and goodness to overcome evil (Rom. 12:14–21). It is significant that neither Jesus nor Paul nor any Spirit-inspired author commands us to love, bless, make peace with, or feed either the Devil or the sin-drives in our own hearts. The text itself draws salient distinctions between the world, the flesh, and the Devil, and our failure to sync our mission to those distinctions can all too easily obfuscate our calling.

When pondering war, therefore, the Christian must ask: Is the object of my warfare the flesh or the Devil? If yes, then fight on. If, however, the church feels assaulted by a militant culture, we need to postpone our natural fight-or-flight response long enough to ponder the unnatural command of Jesus and Paul to meet the force of hatred with the force of love. And we must pray for the supernatural infusion of love necessary to live such an impossible and countercultural command.

LIBERATION OR EXTERMINATION?

This leads us to a second critique of Christian *Kulturkampf*. *Culture war misses the biblical distinction between combatants and captives, thus mistaking a mission of liberation for one of extermination.* A Christian culture warrior may object: “Yes, the Bible does call us to war against Satan. But, as ‘the ruler of this world,’ (Jn. 14:30) Satan enlists human soldiers to carry out his diabolical orders; therefore, you can’t engage in spiritual warfare without simultaneously waging culture war.”

This objection is sound insofar as Scripture insists that there is more than mere human evil at work in culture. Satanic forces were distant and uninterested spectators to the concentration camps, the gulags, or today’s abortion mills; however, arguing to a war-on-culture from a war-on-Satan overlooks another important biblical distinction. Consider Paul’s words:

The Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will (2 Tim. 2:24–26).

Paul does not picture his human opponents as *soldiers* in Satan’s army to be met with lethal force. Rather, they are described as snared *captives* who must be met with kindness, gentle correction, and a hopefulness that works not toward their extermination but their liberation (see Lk. 4:5–6 and Eph. 2:2). Peter summarized Jesus’s ministry to the world not as smiting Satan’s soldiers but as “doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil” (Acts 10:38).

Soldiers make war. Paul calls us to “live peaceably with all” (Rom. 12:18; cf. Heb. 12:14). A soldier sheds his opponent’s blood; Paul sheds tears for his (Phil. 3:18). A soldier becomes cold-hearted toward the enemy; Paul had “unceasing anguish in [his] heart” for those who opposed him (Rom. 9:2). A soldier puts a higher premium on his own survival than that of his enemies; Paul wished to be “accursed and cut off from Christ” for the sake of his unbelieving brothers (Rom. 9:3). Paul was imprisoned, impoverished, battered half to death, and finally decapitated by Nero’s executioners. Paul’s mission was not to put x’s on his enemies’ eyes but “to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins” (Acts 26:18).

From these biblical distinctions, it follows that war-on-Satan does not entail war-on-culture. Our aggressive acts of war against the Devil must be matched by empathetic acts of abolition for our neighbors, who remain trapped in the oppressive grip of history’s oldest human trafficker.

THE METAPHORS MATTER

Am I arguing that a post-*Kulturkampf* Christian no longer offers meaningful critiques of hurtful and dehumanizing ideologies that shape culture, disengages from the political sphere, no longer challenges and converses with those beyond his own spiritual tribe? Am I advocating for a legal and political defeatism, a pietistic withdraw from society, or negotiating the terms of Christianity’s surrender to the secular *zeitgeist*? Not at all. The call of Jesus was never that of a cult leader to coax us from society, to buy guns and gold, and to move to a secluded mountain compound where we all drink Kool-Aid and bid farewell to the world’s problems. Neither does he

call us to assimilation. We must reject both the “Christ *against* culture” and “Christ *of* culture” models (to borrow the categories of Richard Niebuhr) of Christian engagement. Rather, Jesus commissions us to go *into* the world, while rejecting and subverting its false premises. Paul adds:

For though we walk in the flesh, we are not waging war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh but have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every lofty opinion raised against the knowledge of God, and take every thought captive to obey Christ (1 Cor. 10:3-5).

Thus, as we go into the world, there is a necessary component of destruction, namely, debunking arguments and lofty opinions at odds with the Lordship of Christ. In our age, such arguments and opinions are manifold. “Follow your heart.” No, our hearts are fallen and fallible. Repent and follow God’s heart. “Be true to yourself.” No, deny yourself, pick up your cross, and follow Christ. “Our sexual drives and subjective feelings form our core identities and anyone questioning them is an oppressor.” No, God is the sovereign definer of reality and human identity, and a refusal to live within that divine *telos* unleashes oppression on ourselves and others. “The gender binary is a mere social construct erected by cisheteropatriachal oppressors that ought to be dismantled.” No, God created male and female, called that distinction “very good,” and we cannot erase that distinction without losing something precious, God-ordained, and integral to human flourishing. “Humanity should be sorted into good and evil, oppressed verses not oppressed, based on group-based identities of skin tone, sex, and social status.” No, all have sinned and fallen short of God’s glory, all stand in dire need of redemption through Christ, and there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. “Freedoms should be surrendered to the government, when the government deems it in the interest of the public good.” No, Jesus, not Caesar is Lord. Examples could be multiplied.

I am not arguing that Christians self-censor ourselves into passivity on the pressing questions of our world. We must venture beyond our holy huddles with a ready defense as Scripture commands (1 Pet. 3:15). Rather, I am arguing that the *Kulturkampf* metaphor has a profound, often subconscious effect on how we go about obeying Jesus’s Commission to go into the world. Are we going more as disciple-makers or enemy-slayers? Is culture more of a field to plentifully harvest or an army

to be vanquished? Are we more like abolitionists on a mission to liberate people in chains or a SEAL team on a search-and-destroy mission? How shall we then live in the “post-Christian age,” like a jarhead or like Jesus, trying to kill or willing to die for our enemies? The metaphors matter.

MOVING FORWARD

In this issue of the *Journal*, we will advance this theme of engaging culture, challenging its imprisoning ideologies without confusing a mission of liberation with one of extermination. In “Engaging the Culture with Carl F.H. Henry,” Samuel Parkison draws on the wisdom of the revered twentieth-century theologian to chart a more balanced Christian course through our lingering cultural conflicts, one shaped less by the pervasive partisanship of our day. In “American Exceptionalism and Critical Race Theory,” Douglas Groothuis questions trending narratives from both the Left and the Right in the cultural conversation (or rather shouting matches) about America and its checkered legacy. In his contribution “Critical Race Theory: Can We ‘Eat the Meat and Spit Out the Bones’?” Neil Shenvi picks up on these themes, particularly as they relate to the divisive national uproar about Critical Race Theory, one of the latest battlefronts in the so-called culture wars. We close with P. Andrew Sandlin’s “Statism as Toleration,” which places the critical questions raised throughout this issue within the broader milieu of political and legal power as they relate to sustaining a robust Christian worldview in the twenty-first century. It is our hope and prayer that this issue helps you be a more thoughtful and engaging advocate for your faith in the public and legal spheres, while moving beyond the *Kulturkampf* mentality that has marred our Christian witness for too long.

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ENGAGING THE CULTURE WITH CARL F. H. HENRY

BY SAMUEL PARKISON

“No society can long take a rain check on final commitments.” – Carl F. H. Henry

A generation of Christians feels homeless, in more ways than one. On the one hand, many succumb to the temptation to throw our hands in the air and despair of any social, political, legal, and cultural engagement at all. “We will not be cast accurately anyway,” some of us think, “what’s the point?” Others decide that what we need most is to nuance our way out of the extreme Right, while remaining Right enough to be Christian. So we clamor for the attention and affection of secular power-players. “Yeah, *those* MAGA hat-sporting evangelicals *really are the worst*. We’re not like that, though.” In both of these extremes, politics-by-Twitter has produced that deadly combination of throbbing political arrogance and drooling political ignorance.

Some of us are aware of both these errors but still wonder what a faithful evangelicalism looks like in the public square. We want an evangelicalism that is theologically grounded. We want an evangelicalism that avoids escapism and is not afraid of politics. We want an evangelicalism that isn’t idolatrous and that declines the chalice of social power by any means necessary. We want an evangelicalism that is uniquely Christian, and not bi-partisan. We want an evangelicalism that is not so fragile that it cannot identify real injustice or societal sins on the one hand, and is not willing to parrot anti-Christian ideologies to diagnose and resolve those injustices on the other. We want an evangelicalism that helps us thread the needle of being citizens of heaven and sojourners on earth.

Enter Carl F. H. Henry. The kind of evangelicalism we want is the kind Henry helped to pioneer in the twentieth century. In terms of our political, social, cultural moment, here is one of the most vital lessons

Henry holds for us: *Common grace demands Christian concern for the common good. But common grace also commands the Christian reject the “common ground” delusion.* “Common grace” and “common ground” are different. For example, what does the gospel have to do with the amalgam of Marxism and Intersectionality and Postmodernism in terms of partnership? Nothing. The cosmology the former assumes differs fundamentally from that of the latter. They are built not merely on different but on antithetical cosmological and soteriological foundations.

Yet, this does not entail that Christians engaging the public square must necessarily eschew the “woke” secularist’s social concerns as imaginary. Some Christians have concluded that since biblical Christianity and neo-Marxism share nothing by way of philosophical foundations, they must share nothing by way of observation. Thus, any talk of institutionalized racism or systemic injustice, is automatically interpreted as hogwash; however, recognizing the existence of a problem and diagnosing its sources and solutions are not the same thing.

You do not have to be “woke” to know that red-lining was a *sin* that has scarred many minority communities. Sins tend to have a chain reaction. It is not at all inconsistent to say that a young Black man is sinning for assaulting a police officer on the one hand, and insisting that his sin may have been incentivized by a complex of sins committed *against him* that affected him his whole life on the other. Pointing the finger at fatherlessness is all well and good and judicious, but fatherlessness has a complex of causes, including subsidized de-fathering. Let us point the finger at that too, shall we?

Few public theologians have demonstrated the kind of precision needed better than Carl F. H. Henry.

We want an evangelicalism that is not so fragile that it cannot identify real injustice or societal sins on the one hand, and is not willing to parrot anti-Christian ideologies to diagnose and resolve those injustices on the other.

It would be very easy to find one-off lines from Henry and marshal him as the ally of a particular tribe. To those with a “don’t talk about social injustice, just preach the gospel” mindset, the other side could just as well appeal to Henry in their defense:

Hence a sharp and costly disjunction arose, whereby many evangelicals made the mistake of relying on evangelism alone to preserve world order and many liberals made the mistake of relying wholly on socio-political action to solve world problems.¹

Or again: “The Christian has social duties not simply as a Christian but as a man, and his sanctification therein does not come about automatically without pulpit instruction in sound scriptural principles.”² Henry adds, “Despite the perils, no evasion of responsibility for meaningfully relating the gospel to the pressing problems of modern life is tolerable.”³ Or again: “By such evangelical Protestant evasion of the larger problems of social justice . . . contemporary evangelicals contrast sharply with their Reformation heritage.”⁴

Henry is not at all content with Christians taking a raincheck on cultural engagement. No, they may not see themselves out of conversations about societal justice, says Henry, for they are to love their neighbor.

And yet, after firing off at the social justice naysayers, he can turn right around to offer a few choice words to “woke” Christians as well. “If evangelical conscience is to be a remedial and transforming social force, then evangelical convictions require articulate mobilization *on their own account*,”⁵ not on the account of secular theories, for example. Or again: “To write Christian theology in terms of *any* culture-orientation is hazardous.”⁶ Or again:

How may [socialism] be introduced most compellingly [to the Church]? By stressing that poverty is obviously an evil, and by citing cases of destitution that—in the *post*-Christian era—would stir even a pagan conscience. Next, churches are called to condemn, not

only the misuse of riches and the exploitation and neglect of the poor, *but the very idea of economic disproportion*. The clergy are urged to badger the wealthy into sharing their possessions voluntarily with the poor, or to promote the multiplication of their tax burdens as a means of involuntary equalization.⁷

Or again: “That the growing government monopoly of welfare activity is hailed as a valid expression of Christian love for neighbor . . . calls for earnest soul-searching. *The Church will always pay a high price for giving to Caesar what belongs to God.*”⁸

In the end, no one walks away from Henry unscathed. He pins every one of us to the floor. Simply put, Carl F. H. Henry is one of the greatest theological minds the American church has ever known. He was a public theologian and a public intellectual. He read widely. He saw the relevance of Christ’s Lordship to every topic he engaged, and then he wrote about it in cogent and winsome fashion. But what separates him from a handful of other notable Christian public intellectuals is his *depth*. One might imagine such breadth in one figure would mean his limitations on mastery, until one stumbles upon his six-volume project, *God, Revelation, and Authority*. In his career, Henry demonstrated both breadth and depth.

Henry also captured a certain *pithiness*. He could turn a phrase. Henry arrests his reader’s attention with phrases like, “Man is made for God, and without God he is not wholly man; the godless myths hold promise only for the making of monsters.”⁹ Or, “[a]n American classroom that yields irreligious students, and ignores the facts of the Hebrew-Christian religion and its heritage, is neither the friend of democracy nor the foe of totalitarianism.”¹⁰ Or, “Any generation that prizes intercourse above all other intimacies and thinks that through physical love alone, apart from any transcendent relationship, the sex act unlocks life’s deepest secrets and exhausts its mysteries, is doomed to deadly superficiality.”¹¹ If Henry could only see us now.

¹ CARL F. H. HENRY, ARCHITECT OF EVANGELICALISM: ESSENTIAL ESSAYS OF CARL F. H. HENRY 44.

² *Id.* at 45-46.

³ *Id.* at 20.

⁴ *Id.* at 287.

⁵ *Id.* at 45.

⁶ *Id.* at 201.

⁷ *Id.* at 306.

⁸ *Id.* at 319.

⁹ *Id.* at 161.

¹⁰ *Id.* at 226.

¹¹ *Id.* at 322.

Henry was by no means perfect. Like every theologian east of Eden, he had massive blind spots—blind spots we should not dismiss too lightly, especially because some of them were not shared by his own contemporaries. An example would be his views on abortion. While he identified broadly with pro-life sentiments, he nevertheless published some pretty horrifying words on the issue of abortion and the *imago Dei*.¹² Indeed, that part of Henry's corpus is the single greatest disappointment of his career. But while this does not excuse such words as he published, it should be noted that these sentiments are aberrations of an otherwise faithful career in public theology. Henry managed to publish such thoughts *despite* his consistency of thought as a public theologian, not *because* of it. All in all, I commend the writings of Carl F. H. Henry to anyone concerned with faith in the public square. *The Uneasy Conscience of Modern Fundamentalism* is a timely entry point to his thought. He has much to teach us if we would but listen. The Christian world is aching for the

kind of precision our older brother Henry so faithfully demonstrated. Let us follow his example.

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¹² Henry writes, "When childbirth would endanger the mother's life abortion can be morally justifiable. The fetus seems less than human, moreover, in cases of extreme deformity in which rational and moral capacities integral to the *imago Dei* are clearly lacking." CARL F. H. HENRY, *THE CHRISTIAN MINDSET IN A SECULAR SOCIETY: PROMOTING EVANGELICAL RENEWALS & NATIONAL RIGHTEOUSNESS* 103.



AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALISM AND CRITICAL RACE THEORY

BY DOUGLAS GROOTHUIS

I was aghast when I heard a candidate for a faculty position use the terms “American exceptionalism” and “white supremacy” as synonyms. Why would anyone think that? Sadly, today many do. What is American exceptionalism and how does it relate to white racism? The authors of *The 1619 Project*, which is hailed as “a new origins story,” claim that America did not begin in 1776, but in 1619 when the first Blacks slaves were brought to Jamestown. For them America is based on slavery and, thus, rotten to the core, still imbedded in America’s legal institutions, which must, therefore, be dismantled.¹

This is the trending narrative of Critical Race Theory (CRT), a neo-Marxist philosophy that divides societies according to racial struggles between the oppressors (white) and the oppressed (people of color, especially Blacks). Original Marxism pitted the owners of the means of production (the bourgeois) against the workers (the proletariat) and called for a worker’s revolution. Neo-Marxism, however, pits the oppressing whites against the rest, who must rise up and overthrow a “systemically racist” society. America and other Western nations must, therefore, be completely overhauled to enforce “equity.” By “equity,” CRT theorists do not mean equal opportunity for advancement *a la* the Civil Rights vision of Martin Luther King, Jr. Rather they seek proportionally representative outcomes for people of color, particularly Blacks. I cannot address the major claims of CRT here,² but will narrow this piece to the question of American exceptionalism and its implications for a time such as this when racial animosities run high and ideological standoffs are ubiquitous.

CRT fundamentally rejects America’s status as a *good nation*. America is exceptional only in its racism, slavery, classism, sexism, heteronormativity, and in other

manifestations of social pestilence. If you are Black, gay, and female, you are oppressed in an intersectional manner. America is something to be overcome, not celebrated or reformed.

AN EXCEPTIONAL AMERICA

American exceptionalism is, in one important sense, a *fact* historically given the uniqueness of its origin. That is not a matter of interpretation but of recognition.³ Other nations were quick to deem America exceptional in its origin and nature. The notion was not unique to Americans. Nor is it always a commendatory idea. The United States government was formulated by men well versed in the philosophy and history of civil government. There was no need to construct an imaginary *ad hoc* “social contract” to retroactively justify the status quo, as in the case of social contract theories. American historian Richard Hofstadter wrote that the

Founding Fathers were sages, scientists, men of broad cultivation, many of them apt in classical learning, who used their wide reading in history, politics, and law to solve the exigent problems of their time. No subsequent era in our history has produced so many men of knowledge among its political leaders as the age of John Adams, John Dickinson, Benjamin Franklin, Alexander Hamilton, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, George Mason, James Wilson, and George Wythe.⁴

That is exceptional. After the writer G. K. Chesterton (1874-1936) visited America, he said in his 1922 book, *What I Saw in America*, that it was “a nation with the soul of a church.”⁵ Concerning the Declaration, he wrote:

¹ See RED, WHITE, AND BLACK: RESCUING AMERICAN HISTORY FROM REVOLUTIONISTS AND RACE HUSTLERS (Robert Woodson, ed., 2021).

² See my forthcoming book, “Fire in the Streets: How You Can Confidently Respond to Incendiary Cultural Topics” (Salem Books, July 2022) and my 2020 article, “America, Critical Theory, and Social Crisis,” in the Centennial Institute, available at <https://centennial.ccu.edu/america-critical-theory-and-social-crisis>.

³ CHARLES MURRAY, AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALISM: AN AMERICAN EXPERIMENT IN HISTORY 6.

⁴ RICHARD HOFSTADTER, ANTI-INTELLECTUALISM IN AMERICAN LIFE 145 (1966).

⁵ G. K. CHESTERTON, *What I Saw in America* in G. K. CHESTERTON COLLECTION 539 (Catholic Way Pub. 2014).

America is the only nation in the world that is founded on a creed. That creed is set forth with dogmatic and even theological lucidity in the Declaration of Independence; perhaps the only piece of practical politics that is also theoretical politics and also great literature. It enunciates that all men are equal in their claim to justice, that governments exist to give them that justice, and that their authority is for that reason just. It certainly does condemn anarchism, and it does also by inference condemn atheism, since it clearly names the Creator as the ultimate authority from whom these equal rights are derived.⁶

While other nations have emerged through conflict, amalgamation, and diverse economic, political, military, and cultural factors, America began with a statement of purpose, a poetic mission statement. It is as if the Declaration announced to the world, “We are going to exist, and for these reasons, and in this way. We said it. Hold us to it.”

America is exceptional in that it was the first political system to advance a particular “set of philosophical ideas about the nature of human beings.” Humans bear natural rights apart from the actions of the state. These rights are, rather, “every person’s birthright,” writes Charles Murray.⁷ The Declaration bears witness to that birthright, and the Constitution is a kind of covenantal document in light of the Declaration. Understood in light of the Declaration, the Constitution is a sacred trust between the governed and the governing based on “the consent of the governed.” Both the governed and the governing are “created equal” in the eyes of God. As such, no person or race or class can claim supremacy over another. This covenant is far more a mere *contract*, which is a monetary business transaction.

The Founders believed that deprived “of the use of force (a crucial caveat), human beings acting in their private capacity tend to be resourceful and benign. Human beings acting in the political realm tend to be resourceful and dangerous.”⁸ Thus, the state should be limited and not viewed as the engine of human advancement.

The Founders understood the dangers of political power and wanted to limit it. According to the Declaration, civil government was based on “the consent of the governed.” That is what it means to be a *Republic*—not a monarchy, anarchy, aristocracy, or theocracy. That forever

banished the supposed “divine right of kings.” This founding philosophy also stands in stark contrast to the statism and socialism at the heart of CRT, which teaches that the civil government—when purged of whiteness—is the crucial agent in wresting inequity from a racist society, “by any means necessary” (to invoke Malcolm X’s motto).

The Founders’ understanding of human nature inspired the Constitution’s system of checks and balances—especially evident in the three counterbalancing branches of government. Moreover, the Bill of Rights places explicit constraints on the government’s temptation to overreach into the lives of individuals.⁹ Although the Founders were optimistic about the possibilities of civil society under the rule of law, they realized the absolute limits on human nature. As James Madison, the father of the Constitution, wrote in *Federalist 51*:

But what is government itself, but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself.¹⁰

The Founders affirmed a view of human nature consonant with the Christian doctrine of original sin. Humans are made in God’s image, but are always constrained by their fallen natures, which cannot be overcome through any auspices of civil government or legislation.

Original sin is also the great leveler, but does not reduce people to a bland sameness. Chesterton writes that original sin may

be described as the doctrine of the equality of men. But the essential point of it is merely this, that whatever primary and far-reaching moral dangers affect any man, affect all men. All men can be criminals, if tempted; all men can be heroes, if inspired.¹¹

Chesterton adds:

But Christianity preaches an obviously unattractive idea, such as original sin; but when we

⁶ *Id.* at 535.

⁷ *Supra* 3 at 12-13.

⁸ *Id.* at 14.

⁹ *Id.* at 14-15.

¹⁰ THE FEDERALIST NO. 51 (James Madison).

¹¹ *Supra* 5 at 109.

wait for its results, they are pathos and brotherhood, and a thunder of laughter and pity; for only with original sin we can at once pity the beggar and distrust the king.¹²

This balanced view of human nature in relation to civil government is one distinguishing mark of American exceptionalism. It should be recognized, celebrated, and preserved.

America is likewise exceptional as a counterexample to Marxist dogma and prophecy that workers in capitalist societies become increasingly alienated from the fruits of their labor and thus discontent with their oppressed lot. They will rise up against their oppressors and revolt violently, instigating a new “dictatorship of the proletariat.” Although the United States has enjoyed relatively free markets, her workers have never attained “the class consciousness” predicted by Marxists (although the Occupy Wall Street movement attempted to “raise consciousness”). Nor has America fully embraced any genuine form of socialism.¹³ Neither did America develop into a social democracy, as did many European countries. The very workers that Marx thought would unite to overthrow “the system” sometimes formed unions but did not seek the kind of revolutionary state power envisioned by the Marxist dream.¹⁴ While openly Marxist ideology has failed, CRT continues the hope for revolution as it draws in ethnic and sexual minorities into the revolutionary orbit.

America is exceptionally responsible for its exceptional origin and its exceptional blessings of liberty and opportunity. As Jesus said, “From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked” (Lu. 12:48). Every nation is accountable to the Almighty for how it has used the resources and opportunities granted to it by Providence. Thus, Thomas Jefferson trembled when he reflected on the fact that America faced a just God, before whom it could not justify slavery. “Indeed I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just: that his justice cannot sleep forever.”¹⁵

Whatever flaws America has as a Republic, it can, to a great degree, overcome them through the very form of government that was laid down by the Founders. This fits a larger pattern of self-correction in Western civilization. As historian Arthur Schlesinger noted:

Unlike other cultures, the West has conceived and acted upon ideals that expose and combat its own misdeeds. No other culture has built self-criticism into the very fabric of its being. The crimes of the West in time generated their own antidotes. They have provoked great movements to end slavery, to raise the status of women, to abolish torture, to combat racism, to promote religious tolerance, to defend freedom of inquiry and expression, to advance personal liberty and human rights.¹⁶

The American Constitution allows for correction through Amendments. The glorious First Amendment to the Constitution forbids a state church, but prescribes “the free exercise of religion,” along with the freedom of speech, of the press, of assembly, and of petitioning the government for the redress of wrongs. That kind of freedom allows for governmental reform. After the Civil War, the 13-15th Amendments gave full legal rights to all citizens (although that would not be the end of the need for legal reform, given the failures of Reconstruction). These Amendments were too long in the making, but the Founders set up a system that was self-critical and self-correcting and could make for “a more perfect union.”

The allowances made in the Constitution for slavery—although the words “slavery” or “race” do not appear—was a compromise between North and South in order to form a United States.¹⁷ The three-fifths clause was never meant to mean that a slave was a fractional human, but that the slave states could not fully count the slaves to increase their congressional representation in the federal government. It was a way for the North to *limit* the power of the South.¹⁸ Eventually the Constitution became

¹² *Id.* at 329.

¹³ See SEYMOUR MARTIN LIPSET AND GARY MARKS, *IT DIDN'T HAPPEN HERE: WHY SOCIALISM FAILED IN THE UNITED STATES* (2000).

¹⁴ CHARLES MURRAY, *AMERICAN EXCEPTIONALISM: AN EXPERIMENT IN HISTORY* 30-34 (2013).

¹⁵ THOMAS JEFFERSON, *Query XVIII: Manners*, in *NOTES ON THE STATE OF VIRGINIA* (1781). <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/document/notes-on-the-state-of-virginia-query-xviii-manners>.

¹⁶ ARTHUR MEIER SCHLESINGER, *THE DISUNITING OF AMERICA: REFLECTIONS ON A MULTICULTURAL SOCIETY* 132-133 (1992).

¹⁷ The words “race” and “slave” do appear in the South’s Constitution of the Confederate States; March 11, 1861. https://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/csa_csa.asp.

¹⁸ See Robert Goldwin, *Why Blacks, Women, and Jews are Not Mentioned in the Constitution*, *COMMENTARY* (May 1987), <https://www.commentary.org/articles/robert-goldwin/why-blacks-women-jews-are-not-mentioned-in-the-constitution/>.

a time-bomb that exploded slavery, just as Abraham Lincoln¹⁹ and Frederick Douglass²⁰ had hoped.

WHERE DO WE STAND?

How exceptional is America *today* as a nation? That is a question too difficult to answer in detail, but two comments suffice. First, CRT activists renounce the philosophy of the American founding—and so its exceptionalism—and seek to hasten its demise. They want the American experiment to fail in order to be replaced by something else. They equate exceptionalism with white supremacy. America is, to them, exceptionally bad. Some justified the extensive looting of the summer 2020 riots by saying that rioters and looters deserved the goods since the owner's insurance would replace the goods and pay for the damage. Author of *In Defense of Looting*, Vicky Osterweil,²¹ told National Public Radio, "When I use the word looting, I mean the mass expropriation of property, mass shoplifting during a moment of upheaval or riot. That's the thing I'm defending." She wants revenge on those who have supposedly succeeded at the expense of Blacks:

Importantly, I think especially when it's in the context of a Black uprising like the one we're living through now, it also attacks the history of whiteness and white supremacy. The very basis of property in the U.S. is derived through whiteness and through Black oppression, through the history of slavery and settler domination of the country. Looting strikes at the heart of property, of whiteness and of the police.²²

Osterweil takes America to be worthy of destruction and incapable of positive reform according to its founding principles, which, of course, includes the right to private property.

She is not alone. This destructive movement is neither small nor insignificant. Much of America was literally burned down in the summer of 2020 in the wake of George Floyd's death under police custody.²³ When

significant numbers of people, including leaders, renounce the structural integrity of the American system and are enflamed by racial grievance, terrible things happen. There is fire and blood in the streets.

However much the founding vision of the United States has been corrupted or perfected, we still inhabit a Constitutional Republic with a representative government and considerable free speech. The First Amendment has not been overturned, although CRT proponents often claim that the system is so corrupt that free speech is a tool of the oppressors and must, therefore, be limited for the sake of liberation.

Yet there is hope. As Shelby Steele concludes his brilliant book *Shame*, "The contortions of our hyperbolic politics can be depressing. But America's essential truth—the deepest theme of our identity—is still freedom. Freedom is still our mother tongue."²⁴ We still possess the freedom to make the truth of American exceptionalism known and to apply it to American life. Given the greatness of America's founding, its ability to correct its own errors, and the possibility of God's renewed blessing on our troubled land, we may yet see freedom walk hand-in-hand with faith and virtue such that the American experiment endures. The hour is late, but the hour need not be too late.

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¹⁹ See JAMES OAKES, *CROOKED PATH TO ABOLITION: ABRAHAM LINCOLN AND THE ANTI-SLAVERY CONSTITUTION* (2021).

²⁰ See FREDERICK DOUGLASS, *The Constitution of the United States: Is it Pro-slavery or Anti-Slavery?* (1860), available at <https://www.blackpast.org/global-african-history/1860-frederick-douglass-constitution-united-states-it-pro-slavery-or-anti-slavery>.

²¹ VICKY OSTERWEIL, *IN DEFENSE OF LOOTING* (2020). Would the author mind if I stole her book instead of purchasing it?

²² Natalie Escobar, *One Authors Controversial View: In Defense of Looting*, CODESWITCH (August 27, 2020), <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2020/08/27/906642178/one-authors-argument-in-defense-of-looting>.

²³ See DAVID HOROWITZ, *I CAN'T BREATHE: HOW A RACIAL HOAX IS KILLING AMERICA* (2021).

²⁴ Shelby Steele, *Shame: How America's Past Sins Have Polarized Our Country* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 198. See also Os Guinness, *A Free People Suicide: Sustainable Freedom and the American Future* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012).



CRITICAL RACE THEORY: *Can We “Eat the Meat and Spit Out the Bones”?*

BY NEIL SHENVI

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a framework used to conceptualize the interaction of race, law, and culture. It grew out of the Critical Legal Studies movement during the late 1980s, where it was shaped by legal scholars including Derrick Bell, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Mari Marsuda, Charles Lawrence, and Richard Delgado. Since then, CRT has expanded well beyond its original environs. It entered education during the mid-1990s¹ and now enjoys broad application in fields as diverse as health care, sociology, and theology.²

As debates over the compatibility of Christianity and CRT continue to roil the evangelical church, a common refrain among some evangelicals is that we can “eat the meat and spit out the bones” of CRT. Unfortunately, few people go beyond this slogan to ask exactly what it implies or whether it is appropriate. In this essay, I’ll suggest four reasons we should be hesitant to employ this analogy.

CONSISTENCY

The most common defense of “eating the meat and spitting out the bones” is the assertion that “all truth is God’s truth.” This observation is correct, but it cannot—by itself—justify “eat the meat” language with regard to CRT or anything else. After all, elements of truth can be found even in fundamentally corrupt ideologies. Would we tell Christians to “eat the meat and spit out the bones” of Porn Studies? Could we imagine Elijah encouraging the Israelites to mine Baalism for insight, or the Apostle John telling the early church to affirm the positive aspects of Gnosticism?

Even the most dangerous systems of thought get some things right. Indeed, it’s the admixture of lies with truth that makes the lies so potent and so deadly. Consequently, the “meat and bones” illustration is

faulty, unless we are prepared to apply it consistently to everything from Queer Theory to eugenics. Whatever metaphor we use needs to convey the seriousness of the errors made by these ideologies.

SUPERFICIAL AGREEMENT

A second common defense of the “eat the meat, spit out the bones” analogy is an appeal to areas of agreement between Christianity and CRT. For example, Christians who read large CRT anthologies are likely to find that sixty percent of the articles are—on their surface—unremarkable, that twenty percent are genuinely insightful, and that twenty percent are patently absurd or grossly unbiblical.³ Similarly, Christians sometimes argue that CRT and Christianity are compatible by focusing on obvious, shared affirmations like “race is a social construct” or “we ought to seek justice.”

However, we should not make too much of this merely superficial agreement. For example, it is quite possible to read books on parenting or leadership or time management by Mormon authors and to agree with nearly all that is said. In many cases, Mormons will even use words familiar to Christians, like “grace” or “salvation.” Yet beneath this superficial agreement lies deep theological disagreement.⁴ In the same way, superficial agreement is no reason to think that Christianity and CRT are fundamentally compatible, especially once you understand the semantic baggage that CRT proponents pack into words like “whiteness,” “equity,” or “justice.”

FUNDAMENTAL DISAGREEMENT

The key question in this discussion is not whether critical race theorists *ever* affirm anything that is true (they certainly do) or whether Christians can learn *anything* from reading the work of critical race theorists (we certainly can). The real question is whether the *central tenets*

¹ Gloria Ladson-Billings and William F. Tate, *Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education*, 97 *TEACHERS COLLEGE RECORD* 47-68 (1995).

² RICHARD DELGADO AND JEAN STEFANCIC, *CRITICAL RACE THEORY: AN INTRODUCTION* 7-9 (1984).

³ See, e.g., KIMBERLÉ CRENSHAW ET AL., *CRITICAL RACE THEORY: THE KEY WRITINGS THAT FORMED THE MOVEMENT* (1995); RICHARD DELGADO AND JEAN STEFANCIC, *CRITICAL RACE THEORY: THE CUTTING EDGE* (2013).

⁴ See, e.g., BILL MCKEEVER AND ERIC JOHNSON, *MORMONISM 101: EXAMINING THE RELIGION OF THE LATTER-DAY SAINTS* (2000).

of CRT are compatible with a Christian worldview. While Christians who are friendly to CRT tend to define it nebulously, there is no shortage of CRT thinkers who have drawn up explicit lists of the “defining elements” of their discipline. For the sake of space, I’ll focus on one claim that shows up again and again: CRT insists that racism, sexism, and homophobia are all “interlocking systems of oppression” that must be fought simultaneously. Here are just a few examples:

Critical race theory works toward the end of eliminating racial oppression as part of the broader goal of ending all forms of oppression.

Racial oppression is experienced by many in tandem with oppressions on grounds of gender, class, or sexual orientation. Critical race theory measures progress by a yardstick that looks to fundamental social transformation. The interests of all people of color necessarily require not just adjustments within the established hierarchies, but a challenge to hierarchy itself.⁵

The intercentricity of race and racism with other forms of subordination [is a tenet of CRT].... CRT acknowledges the inextricable layers of racialized subordination based on gender, class, immigration status, surname, phenotype, accent and sexuality.⁶

[CRT] insists that one cannot understand the inequalities within society if one fails to understand classism, sexism, religious intolerance, homophobia, transphobia, etc.⁷

Note that “oppression” and “subordination” here do not refer primarily to “discrimination, violence, and cruelty,” but rather to the very existence of norms surrounding gender and sexuality that produce “social inequality.” This sentiment spans nearly three decades of CRT

scholarship and is found in some of the very earliest texts (*Words That Wound*) written by the movement’s founders (Matsuda, Crenshaw, Lawrence, Delgado) just four years after its creation (1993).

This foundational element of CRT exposes the folly of thinking that it can be applied solely to race. Critical race theorists themselves will be the first to insist that CRT is necessarily embedded in a larger liberatory and revolutionary project. To the extent that you affirm complementarian theology or traditional sexual ethics, you must reject one of the core tenets of CRT. Moreover, this disagreement is merely a symptom of

a much deeper underlying conflict in how Christianity and CRT conceptualize ideas like “justice,” “equality,” and “oppression.”

This single contradiction is enough to show how deep the disconnect between Christianity and CRT actually is. We need hardly go far into the culture or into the church before we see how embracing the ideas of CRT has led to the rapid abandonment of biblical teachings on gender and sexuality.

While Christians who are friendly to CRT tend to define it nebulously, there is no shortage of CRT thinkers who have drawn up explicit lists of the “defining elements” of their discipline.

THE PROBLEM OF DISCERNMENT

One final problem with the “eat the meat and spit out the bones” analogy is its misguided assumption about the ability of many to exercise discernment on these topics. 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 four Skittles in there.”⁸ Ideally, Christians *should* have a familiarity with primary sources when engaging with contemporary issues. But there is a significant difference between recommending a book negatively as a prime example of unbiblical and toxic thinking that needs to be resisted and recommending it positively as a source of profound insight that needs to be embraced.

⁵ MARY MATSUDA ET AL., *WORDS THAT WOUND: CRITICAL RACE THEORY, ASSAULTIVE SPEECH, AND THE FIRST AMENDMENT* 6-7 (1993).

⁶ Tara J. Yosso, *Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth*, 8 *RACE ETHNICITY AND EDUCATION* 69, 73-74 (2005).

⁷ KHIARA M. BRIDGES, *CRITICAL RACE THEORY: A PRIMER* 14 (2019).

⁸ Among other things, 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.... I strive to be ‘less white.’ To be less white is to be less racially oppressive.” ROBIN DIANGELO, *WHITE FRAGILITY* 149-50 (2018).

If Christians are insistent on using this slogan, they must specify exactly what supposed “meat” is to be found in these books and precisely which “bones” readers are likely to choke on. However, an entirely different approach is far more prudent: simply explain the “meat” on its own without any recourse to CRT. If common grace has allowed certain scholars to discover particular truths about race via the fundamentally flawed lens of CRT, then why not teach these truths directly, as they are discerned through general revelation and illuminated by Scripture? My fear is that vague sloganeering has, more often than not, allowed people to smuggle error into the church under the mantle of “plundering the Egyptians.”

We can and should tell the truth about the United States’ sordid racial past, about present-day discrimination, and about the unity we find in Christ without

appealing to unbiblical frameworks. As Christians, we don’t have to choose between embracing racism or embracing CRT. We can and must reject both.

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STATISM AS TOLERATION

BY P. ANDREW SANDLIN

The title of this piece may seem confusing, if not downright self-contradictory. Statism appears to be antithetical of toleration. The state is an agent of coercion. If you disobey the state, its agents can throw you in jail or even kill you. That is not toleration.

Nor is this intolerance illegitimate. According to Romans 13, the state (the civil minister) “bears the sword.” The state coercively suppresses certain specific expressions of public evil in order to protect its law-abiding citizens. We sometimes speak of state-sponsored terrorism, as in the case of Afghanistan or North Korea; but according to the Bible, the state *can, in a qualified sense, be a valid agent of a terror*—a terror to evildoers. Paul writes,

For [political] rulers are not a **terror** to good works, but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good, and you will have praise from the same. For he is God’s minister to you for good. But if you do evil, **be afraid**; for he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God’s minister, an avenger to *execute wrath* on him who practices evil.¹

Precisely because the state enjoys this legitimate monopoly on violence, its authority must be severely limited. It’s permitted to suppress only a few evils. The vast majority of sins are not crimes, but rather a narrow range of sins can and must be punished by the state, coercively, and if necessary, even violently: murder, rape, kidnapping, assault, battery, theft, fraud, and so forth.

The state is an agent of terror, and, when operating within its biblically prescribed limits, we can be grateful for this. When a maniacal sniper targets women and children from a downtown rooftop, we long for the terror that the state can inflict to halt him in his tracks.

WHAT IS STATISM?

Statism, however, is an illegitimate expression of the state. Statism is the notion that there is no social problem for which increased political control is not the best

solution. Any social problem (poverty, drug addiction, uneducated youth, wealth disparities, or a viral epidemic) is, in the final analysis, a political problem on this view. More theoretically, it is an ideology that posits the state as the basic cohesiveness of society. As Robert Nisbet points out in *The Social Philosophers*, the political community takes precedence over society’s kinship community, the religious community, and the ecological community, among others. The individual is first and primarily a citizen of the state and only secondarily and derivatively a member of the family, church, business, neighborhood, and so on. The state, or politics, is the glue that holds society together.

If you want to see evidence of statism’s success in the modern West, simply gauge how many internet, cable, and network TV news stories focus on the political environs of Washington, D.C. When politics dominates the 24/7 news cycle, statism has become a reigning ideology in a given culture.

STATISM AND TOLERATION

It is precisely at this point that statism necessitates toleration. A. J. Conyers observes that the modern idea of toleration began with the rise of the nation-state in the wake of the Thirty Years’ War ending in the mid-seventeenth century.² The European continent and British Isles were roiled with religious bloodshed, Roman Catholic versus Protestant on the continent and (mostly) high-church royalist Anglicans versus Cromwellian Puritans on the British Isles. European society, exhausted with millions of deaths over religious (but not exclusively religious) differences, eventually decided that the best way to preserve peace was to deemphasize religion, or more specifically, to cool its intensity. An ingenious way to do this was a demand for toleration: the state would no longer demand a formal religious commitment of its citizens (Roman Catholic or Protestant, for example). If it made any semblance of such a demand then it must provide room for peaceful dissent: “Believe what you want, and don’t argue about it too much.”

¹ Romans 13:3, 4.

² A. J. CONYERS, *THE LONG TRUCE: HOW TOLERATION MADE THE WORLD SAFE FOR POWER AND PROFIT* (2009).

After religious carnage and bloodshed, such an arrangement brought great relief, but also sowed the seeds of modern statism that has produced bloodshed in the twentieth century even greater than that of the first half of the seventeenth century. The Soviet Union, Red China, Nazi Germany, fascist Italy, nationalist Japan, and Khmer Rouge Cambodia serve as unnerving case studies. It did not take long, however, for the toleration mavens to figure out that the disestablishment of religion itself would not do the trick of cooling off religious intensity. *What was needed was an alternate intensity.* That alternate intensity was found in the state itself, or in politics.

One essential step in accomplishing this shift of intensity to the state was to marginalize God's two most basic social institutions: the natural institution of the family, and the supernatural institution of the church. The state had to break the natural bonds within the family and the supernatural bonds within the church. Conyers puts it this way:

The idea of toleration, in the modern sense, calls into question the validity and even the ethical appropriateness of attaching oneself too strongly to the kinds of loyalties and the kinds of transcendent convictions that are the very *soul* of the association. It targets the intractable loyalties, along with the intrinsic disciplines and moral commitments, of the family and the church and the synagogue. (emphasis in original)³

The strategy of state toleration was to mitigate doctrinal differences between, for example, Roman Catholics and Protestants (or, for that matter, between Presbyterians, Lutherans, and Baptists) while insisting on loyalty to the political order, encompassing all. In more recent times, this trajectory of tolerance has stretched from the family to the home, evidenced by lax no-fault divorce laws, recreational birth control, pervasive pornography, wives' separate-track careerism, and so-called children's

rights—including abortion and “gender-reassignment surgery” for minors.

In the church, this has included erosion of the sanctity of the Lord's Day and Covid lockdowns that define the church as “nonessential.” In its own narrow domain, the church is tolerated, so long as its authority does not overlap with the authority of the state. As Conyers declares, “the church . . . must either be mastered in public or quarantined to the private sphere of life.”⁴ Intensity of devotion and commitment is transferred from the family and church, to the state. How does this fundamental shift in allegiances take place?

Nationalized healthcare obviates family responsibility for the sick and aged, and vast social safety nets undermine obligation of families and churches to care for the less fortunate or providentially impoverished under their care.

STATE AS DEITY

First, the state is now the final arbiter of morality. Delimiting morality was once the province of the family and the church under divine authority, declaring, for example, when sex was appropriate. Today, what is legal is considered moral. The state decides—or delimits the range of moral choices.

Second, the state circumvents these basic institutions by providing a direct authority to which individuals can appeal in order to practice radical autonomy. “Pansexuals” (champions of their own “gender fluidity”) can legally demand the pronoun by which they are addressed. Parents are accorded no veto power.

Third, the state provides the earthly security once furnished by the family and church. Nationalized healthcare obviates family responsibility for the sick and aged, and vast social safety nets undermine obligation of families and churches to care for the less fortunate or providentially impoverished under their care. The family and church are spheres that expect nothing more than mild commitment—if commitment at that. The state, on the other hand, demands devotion and rewards loyalty with protection, approval, and money. The state in effect replaces not just the family and church, but becomes a *de facto* deity.

The state demands that individuals be exceedingly tolerant with one another over differences in the family and church, whether homosexual, heterosexual, or non-binary; whether theologically liberal or conservative or

³ *Id.*

⁴ *Id.*

atheist; and whether abortion-committed or addiction-obsessed. These are issues and practices people just should not be fighting over. There must be toleration according to statism.

THE INTOLERANCE OF MODERN TOLERATION

Statism, however, also demands intolerance. Since absolute toleration is an impossibility in any society, statism mandates its own version of intolerance. In some cases, there has been a full inversion from the earlier intolerance within historical Christian cultures. While Christian culture will not tolerate homosexual practice, statist culture will not tolerate opposition to homosexual practice. This is not simply a case of the federal government forbidding states and towns from criminalizing homosexuality. It also means that churches and families could face legal difficulties if they forbid or merely question homosexual practice.

The same holds true of abortion. In Christian culture, abortion violates the intrinsic dignity and worth of all of God's image-bearers—regardless of size and location—and is, therefore, illegal. In modern statist culture, the Supreme Court will not permit the criminalization of abortion. You are essentially forbidden to forbid sin. This is simply to say that statism is profoundly tolerant of any ideas and actions that will guarantee and enhance its own authority, tending to undermine or dilute institutions like the family and the church that compete with its presumed supremacy.

The state may be tolerant of individuals and their views and choices, but not *groups* and their views and choices. Toleration in this modern sense is deeply anti-community. Why? Because it seeks to supplant all other communities with the political community. We have now lived to experience what Conyers describes as “the long-term consequences of the society in which individuals come to think of themselves as free from every bond except that of the state.”⁵

This new statist intolerance is much more dangerous than earlier intolerance could possibly be. Since the state is an inherently coercive institution, its intolerance can be nearly absolute. In historic Christian cultures, it was possible—though sometimes difficult—to escape a misguided intolerance of the family and church. In today's world, however, it is virtually impossible to escape the coercive intolerance of the ubiquitous state. There is no human recourse from statism. When Christian

orthodoxy no longer provides the social order, secular orthodoxy must.

CONCLUSION

Both intolerance and toleration are inescapable concepts. No society can exist without intolerance or toleration. The only question is who and what will, and will not, be tolerated. In Christian culture, very few practices are coercively not tolerated. These must be defined strictly in accord with God's law. Legislatures cannot simply make up evils—actual or perceived—that they refuse to tolerate. There is a Law above the law, namely God's standards for human flourishing.

Within non-coercive institutions like the family and church, unrepentant sins like slander, adultery, homosexuality, and heresy will not be tolerated, but they may not be coercively suppressed. The family and church may never wield the sword. If you cannot abide biblical authority in these spheres, you can attach yourself to other families or move to other churches (harmful to your life though these decisions might be). This means that a Christian culture is tolerant *within the realm of the state* of a vast majority of sins, erroneous beliefs, and difference of opinion. Such culture is *non-coercively* intolerant of such error and evil in the family and the church. This is an example of a genuinely tolerant society.

In our modern, secular, contra-Christian statist culture, by contrast, toleration is demanded for sin, evil, and false views in the family and church because the state increasingly prohibits these God-sanctioned institutions from exercising their lawful, non-coercive authority. The state grows increasingly intolerant of the family and church, that is, intolerant of authority that would non-coercively oppose these evils. The long-term strategy of Christians must be to restore the kind of culture that is tolerant in terms of the Christian faith, which grants the widest latitude towards citizens (even unbelievers), and replaces the state's perverse tolerance with true toleration.

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⁵ *Id.*

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