A „DIFFICULT DISCUSSION“:

CHRISTIAN EVANGELICALISM AND CRITICAL RACE THEORY

WITH Soong Chan Rah, Jason Alvis, Carl Raschke, Scott Coley, and John Zivojinovic. Also Kev Grane, Rachel Foley, Alyssa Putzer, Dianna Able, Joshua Ramos, and Suhayb Yunus.

The following "Difficult Discussion" took place on September 23, 2021. Participants include distinguished invited guests and the editorial staff of Whitestone Publications. An online versions can be found at https://thenewpolis.com/2021/12/01/christian-evangelicalism-and-critical-race-theory-difficult-discussions/.

Carl Raschke: Well, welcome to the first session of Difficult Discussions. Difficult Discussion, starting this year, is paired on a monthly basis with Critical Conversations on the same topic. The next Critical Conversation, which will be on Tuesday, September 28th, is with Eric Kaufman of the Birkbeck College at the University of London. He is an internationally known political scientist and demographer. He will be talking about his book about populism and white politics, the book called *Whiteshift*, so it will be a slightly different take.

I'll explain how we operate here. We've started to do this because Critical Conversations, which we've done for the last 12 months, is primarily a kind of academic talking heads with people allowed to come in and ask questions or make comments. We established Difficult Discussions because we don't want this to be an academic talking head. We want full participation from the public. So, you might say this is a true experiment in what we call the public intellectual enterprise. It is going to be more collaborative and communicative among participants.

You've all kind of gotten the ground rules for how we're going to function. I won't introduce everybody—except our main guests—right now; those who will be respondents, or members of the Whitestone Publications staff. Whitestone Publications is a 501c3 nonprofit corporation registered in the state of Colorado that has been publishing two major electronic journals, one for over 20 years and the other one for several years: *The Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* and *The New Polis.* The staff of

Whitestone Publications is here with us to respond. They have different roles, many of them, in fact most of them, are in graduate programs at the University of Denver. So, this venture is also a partnership with the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences at the University of Denver; in other words, they pay the bills and we supply the labor, and you know, what other public personalities might come in handy.

Our guests, who I'm going to introduce right now, will be giving about a five-minute presentation or remarks about their answer to the prompt about Critical Race Theory and evangelicalism. What is it and what does it have to do with evangelicalism, Christian evangelicalism, at all. After they've finished delivering remarks, our staff, or our editorial team as we prefer to call them, will be giving their own responses, promptings, or objections, trying to shift the conversation. But this is not cable television, we don't want people fighting with each other.

To make sure things don't get too bloody or brawly, I've invited a former MA student from the University of Denver and a good friend of mine who's worn many hats. His name is John Zivojinovic. We call him the Z man because I've known him now for over 25 years and I still can't spell his name. But I know how to pronounce it, at least. You can see it, Zivojinovic. What can I say? Praise him to the sky, but just let me say a little bit about who he is and then I'll get to introduce guests.

John received his PhD from Nova Southeastern University in the social sciences, specifically, and this is why I invited him to conflict analysis and resolution. His first master's was from Moody Theological Seminary and his second is from the University of Denver, where he took courses me. He got a master's degree in philosophy. By the way, the first course he sat in on was Nietzche, in which I played the madman in the death of God, and that's kind of been an ongoing tradition. So, John keeps bringing that up, but we have no madmen with lanterns in this particular conversation. He spent 30 years in pastoral ministry and now he's a lead philosophy instructor in the Colorado Community College system online.

So let me go down to our other guests; we had invited two other people; one had to cancel last minute because they're in a cabin in Colorado and their internet is not working, you know how that is. We tried to get some other people to get kind of

different voices but we were unable to secure them this time. So let me start with somebody who does not have a University of Denver connection here anyway, and that is professor Soong Chan Rah. Did I pronounce that correctly?

Soong Chan Rah: Really good, really good for a non-Korean, yes.

Carl Raschke: Okay good. He's the Robert Boyd Munger Professor of Evangelicalism at Fuller Theological Seminary. He just joined their faculty starting this month. He holds a PhD from Duke Divinity School and has authored or coauthored over half a dozen and many award-winning books, including The Next Evangelicalism: Freeing the Church from Western Cultural Captivity and Many Colors: Cultural Intelligence for a Changing Church, and then finally, *Unsettling Truths: The Ongoing Dehumanizing Legacy of the Doctrine of Discovery*. which, interestingly enough, was the topic of our first Critical Conversation last year. He's also a pastor in the Evangelical Covenant Church.

Our next guest is Scott Coley. I can pronounce that. He's a lecturer in philosophy at Mount Saint Mary's University in Maryland. He's the author of a not yet published book, which looks very interesting to me, and it's relevant, along with several articles he's published in philosophy journals. The book, which interests me, is called *After the Culture War: Justice, Politics, and American Evangelicalism.* He has a Ph.D. from Purdue University.

And finally, Jason Alvis, who's also our European editor and kind of our, I'll say you're our man in Bremen, or our man in the backwoods, the redneck part of Germany; is that fair? He's a lecturer in philosophy at the University of Vienna and co-principal of a major international grant project, that I've been involved in. Jason, can you tell us the title of your grant project?

Jason Alvis: Yeah, the current one is called *Revenge of the Sacred: Phenomenology, The Ends of Christianity, and Europe*.

Carl Raschke: Great. He holds a PhD from the University of Denver. So, our editorial team, I'm not going to introduce you now, I'll let you introduce yourself when you start.

Now we'll get into the discussions. John, when we get to these people actually interacting with each other, that's when you need to bring down the hammer. Okay, and also feel free to

offer as one of the respondents your own views as well, or you can do it right after all our guests have made their statements. Does that sound fair? Great, thank you. Alright, so I'm going to stop chatting because my mouth is getting dry. So, if you don't mind, I'll just start with the people in the order that I introduced people. So, Soong Chan, is that how you like to be addressed?

Soong Chan Rah: That's fine, thank you.

John Zivojinovic: Just so you know, gentlemen, I'm gonna start a clock for five minutes. When you're down to one minute, I'm just gonna say one minute just so you have an idea. I'll try not to be intrusive, but I want to make you aware we don't want to go on and on and on, and we want to make sure everybody gets a chance. Okay, Soong Chan?

Soong Chan Rah: Thank you, I'll get right to it. I want to talk about the two terms that we are engaging in and a sharper definition because part of the challenge in this conversation is, as I think that many of you are aware of already, a conflation or a confusion around both these terms, evangelicalism and critical race theory. So, I'll begin with actually evangelicalism and the confusion around this term, as in how it is popularly used and how it should be—maybe more specifically—used and that there is not just an evangelicalism, but there are multiple variations and expressions of evangelicalism.

Historian Don Dayton has been really good at trying to expand evangelicalism beyond some of the more limiting definitions that have been used both historically and sociologically. Evangelicalism has multiple threads, and I'm going to just highlight a few of them because of their impact on this particular topic. The most noticeable one, or notable one that folks reference back to is a fundamentalism that is noted in evangelicalism, and this goes back to things like the Scopes Trial and the response the Scopes Trial, as a kind of fundamentalism of faith. There are these five fundamentals that are very important to the framing of faith. That group, the fundamentalist evangelicals, have what I call a truth-possessed approach to both theology and politics, as in, I own this truth within the bounded set of ideas that I have, and therefore those outside of it are unacceptable and to be rejected.

So, this is where you get some of the of the culture warrior. Fundamentalists would view the world as "I hold these truths. These are very important foundational, fundamental truths of

my faith, and therefore anything outside of that needs to be rejected." And you can see how a fundamentalist evangelical would view something like critical race theory as something outside of the appropriate boundaries and therefore reject it, even maybe without considering what that means, but because it is not within the set boundaries. "These are not the fundamentals of my faith."

A couple other threads that are helpful to understand would be the reformed thread and the Pentecostal thread. These are also highly steeped in a theological framework of truth-possessed, the theological framework of bounded set. And so, the idea of these ideas that come from outside of that community would, in many ways, be obviously held in suspicion, but oftentimes just kind of categorically rejected, such as the theory of evolution by fundamentalists in the 1920s, in the early half of the 20th century, and such as critical race theory, in the 21st century, by those from the fundamentalist, reformed, and Pentecostal threads.

What's interesting to me, though, is that there are a couple other threads that have a different relationship with these other threads. So, one would be the group that emerges in the 1970s and the 1980s: the neo-evangelicals, and they come from all these different spaces. So, they might be coming from a fundamentalist, maybe southern Baptist space denominationally, or they might be coming from a reform, maybe Presbyterian, denominational space, or Pentecostal/AOG space. But they kind of converge in the 70s around this neo-evangelical space. And a lot of the neo-evangelical spaces are hyperpragmatic.

This is where you get things like the church growth movement, the secret sensitive churches, the mega-churches, the kind of conferences, and the literature that revolved around this neo-evangelicalism of the 1970s. This is when neo-evangelicalism has this kind of suspicious, ambivalent, ambiguous relationship with culture and politics. Many of the neo-evangelicals actually don't get involved in politics. So if you think about the neo-evangelical names of the last 20 years, you think of the Rick Warrens and the Bill Hybels and the Tim Kellers; they tend to be by and large apolitical. They don't have this kind of culture-warrior mentality.

What's interesting to me is that you can kind of say, okay, fundamentalist, reforms, Pentecostals will have a knee-jerk reaction against something like critical race theory, but it has also

been neo-evangelicals who have been kind of antagonistic to critical race theory as well. So that's something that needs to be kind of explored, as to say, did the neo-evangelicals adapt some of the culture war, and would they agree to the culture warrior stance that fundamentalists/reforms/Pentecostals would be more akin to?

The fifth group is progressive evangelicals, and this is the group that would actually look at critical race theory in a favorable light and sees that approach to understanding the world around them as a help rather than a distraction or a negative to their understanding of society. I don't know how much time I have, but I thought I would talk a little about the term... I'm maxed out, okay, I didn't get to the critical race theory part.

But just as a quick aside, it is clear already, as others are going to mention, that it is clearly a misunderstanding of what critical race theory is. So, if you talk to any of these evangelical, neo-evangelical—it doesn't matter the thread almost—if you ask them to define critical race theory, that definition will be all over the map, and it really doesn't actually line up with what critical race theory—the academic discipline, the actual specific discipline. It doesn't match up to that at all. So, again, there's kind of a categorical rejection and a lot of that comes from the evangelical ethos and worldview.

John Zivojinovic: Okay, thank you.

Carl Raschke: I guess, Scott, next?

Scott Coley: Okay, thank you. So, my training is in analytic philosophy; I'm a recovering analytic philosopher, I guess. But I've only come so far, so I've written out my remarks. I hope that's okay. So, I think there are at least three distinct things that the term critical race theory picks out. Given the subject of today's conversation, I'll start by highlighting and dismissing what we might call CRT and the popular evangelical imagination, sort of picking up where we left off there, right. And I think that this CRT and the popular evangelical imagination has become something of a proxy battle in the religious right's culture war.

In some conservative evangelical circles, for example, CRT incudes any discussion of race that links racially disparate outcomes to the facts of American history or problematic institutional arrangements. Here's an example of how this plays

out. Some evangelicals talk as though the concept of systemic racism is a creature of CRT and they define CRT strictly in terms of theorizing about racist attitudes. So according to this paradigm, systemic racism is a contrivance of critical race theory theorists who wish to assert the ubiquity of racial prejudice among white Americans, an assertion that rings false to white evangelicals who reflect on their own attitudes and think to themselves, *well, I'm not racist, so systemic racism can't be real, right?*

And then you add in the assertion that CRT has a theoretical connection to Marxism or cultural Marxism, and the Gestalt that emerges is that systemic racism is a myth, perhaps even a conspiracy theory, in the language of one erstwhile Newsweek column, originating in the minds of godless Marxists who say defamatory things about white people in America in an effort to desecrate the West's intellectual inheritance. It's really a remarkable sleight of hand, actually. by identifying the concept of systemic racism with a group of radical Marxists who theorize about the preponderance of racist attitudes, white evangelicals can dismiss all claims of systemic racism without addressing a single substantive fact about the existence or prevalence of racialized institutional injustice, like racial disparities in wealth, income and educational opportunity that are clearly rooted in discriminatory housing policies that remained officially enforced until 1968 and unofficially enforced of course well after that.

So, having discarded the caricature of CRT that we find in the popular evangelical imagination, I think two spheres of application for this term, critical race theory, stand out by way of highlighting the potential usefulness of critical race theory to evangelical Christianity back to sort of the original question. So, one area of application has to do with psychology, reflecting on attitudes about race and how race is conceptualized and so forth. I'm least familiar with that aspect of CRT, so I'll let others comment on that.

The other major concern of CRT is institutions including the domain of overlap between institutional and psychological analyses, where we find questions of ideology in particular features of human cognition, which lead us to embrace myths and propaganda that legitimize unjust social hierarchies. And that, I think, is the source of much resistance to CRT among white evangelicals. I don't know what to say about whether CRT specifically is the most fruitful resource for Christian reflection on institutional justice or ideology. Maybe, maybe not, but we

need something because for about 50 years the religious right has been using the resources of Christian theology to underwrite the legitimizing myth that wealth, income, and opportunity in the US are allocated justly, according to Merit.

And many on the Christian right have lost the ability to differentiate their Christian faith from the mythology that their faith has been used to prop up. Which is to say, many on the Christian right have become white Christian nationalists. I do think that CRT, particularly in the hands of Christians, furnishes us with resources to problematize white Christian nationalism, and I think that's why white Christian nationalists are so terrified for critical race theory. And at the moment I see anything that poses a threat to white Christian nationalism as good for Christians and good for America. The end, I don't know how much time I have left.

John Zivojinovic: I'll tell you, you have about forty seconds.

Scott Coley: fourty seconds, alright, well, thank you for inviting me to participate. That's all I have to say for now.

John Zivojinovic: Good, who's next, Carl?

John Raschke: Jason?

Jason Alvis: Well, as already mentioned by Carl, I'm here in Germany so I have a different perspective on the problems that you all are dealing with over there. I have more of an armchair perspective than it is a real boots-on-the-ground perspective. But I do have some observations from where I'm sitting and there are many problems that critical race theory as I see it addresses here in Germany. We have very similar problems, not the same but very similar. So first I want to say just a tiny bit about what critical race theory is. I mean, it has its roots, I would say first of all, in one of the widest movements in philosophy ever. Hear me out on this.

Despite this word critical, its roots are in one of the most optimistic philosophical movements in recent history of critical theory. It's rooted in a movement in Germany, especially from the 40s up until the late 60s, of male academic white elite Germans who really tried to take the content of the Enlightenment as seriously as ever and tried to give every person a seat at the table exposing ideologies of power and in the same sense trying to respond in the wake of Auschwitz and the genocide of Jewish peoples and all the racism in Germany. So,

some might even call this movement, critical theory, colonial guilt at its very best.

Or, as Horkheimer, one of the founders of critical theory once put it, "critical theory seeks the emancipation of human beings from the circumstances that enslave them." Now there's a number of thinkers that have influenced critical theory, and it had been built out of critical theory from Gramsci to Derrida, Foucault, Franz Fanon and many others. But it gained its namesake in the 70s through law scholars of all people who were coming to read critical theorists, especially those of the European ilk, and attempted to take seriously these philosophical problems of emancipation and rationality, but also to look at the decline or the retreat of some of the advancements that have been made in the civil rights era in terms of race.

So, I would say critical race theory is by no means in full agreement with all the attackers that pin it for us, as Scott has already mentioned quite well. I don't really need to say much more about this straw man of critical race theory as it gets lumped into a host of other problems with wokeness and social justice and so on. But it is something that has had a major impact on affirmative action, practical law as it's being practiced today. And it is something that's drawing great attention, so I want to say something really quick about its usefulness for Christian evangelicals, that was one of the parts of the question in the prompt. How is it useful?

So, as a good Baptist, I have three points. It's helpful for reaching in, reaching up, and reaching out, and now we are very specifically talking about the church. But how can the church use critical race theory? First, reaching out, it's a silver platter for missional engagement. If churches want to be true to their name of evangelizing some good news, there is an incredible opportunity in critical race theory. It provides opportunity to bring other people in and to draw others into emancipation, and what more of a theological topic, soteriological topic, of atonement and reconciliation than emancipation? And critical race theory helps us think more closely of emancipation.

Point two, reaching in. Critical race theory provides opportunities for institutional investigation; so one of the great thinkers of critical race theory, philosopher James Baldwin, argued over half a century ago. We need to look at the material facts, don't just look at the abstract beliefs of communities. But look at the material facts of how people live their lives, where they spend their money, look at their purchase history. Take a

look at your own purchase history and see if those material facts line up with your actual beliefs. This is a truth we can learn from critical race theory, and it's something that helps us look at the church, look at our individual churches, and see if there's anything dangerously naïve about how we relate with other peoples, and especially people that are different from us and how we pin them to be quite different from us.

Then the third is reaching up. It helps us develop solidarity, not division. This is one concern that many hold about critical race theory—that it creates an Us versus Them, Us (minority populations) v. Them (the white majority populations). Set this kind of dynamic up against critique of critical race theory, it's not simply that way. I'll say it quite simply, it's not just directed against white people, it's much deeper than that. As J. Cameron Carter, the black theologian once put it so brilliantly in my opinion, racism is killing white people softly with what he called a white melancholy.

It's something that we see today and a certain sadness of this major division that we're experiencing today. So, in the sense that critical race theory can give us a new way to experience God and that's the third Point, reaching up to experience God and experience unification, solidarity with God and with other people. If you look at this very word, atonement, it means at-one-ment, so atonement with God also means at-one-ment with brothers and sisters and other persons in the body of Christ. Thank you.

John Zivojinovic: Thank you, Jason, Carl?

Carl Raschke: John, do you want to say something now yourself?

John Zivojinovic: Well, what I find fascinating is critical race theory, and again we have the academics and I'm more of a pragmatist, personally, so I'm in a different league. But I remember that when I was a senior pastor, and I asked an African American to join our preaching team, not because he was black, but because he was a really good communicator and I just remember some of the people in the congregation—not most, most of the people loved it, thought it was great—it really stretched them. I mean, it really pushed their concept and their whole thing.

So, I think the whole thing is about where faith and culture kind of gets interwoven. I believe our second speaker's response,

Scott, was talking about that. I think there's some real things there that CRT has an opportunity for us. I think that was, also institutional examination. I think there's a huge opportunity to examine what are we doing? Why are we doing it? What's the value? What's the benefit? Who are we protecting? What in just asking really hard questions? So, to me, anything in culture that can help us evaluate is a win. And so, I'm an advocate for that, but again, I thought everybody did a great job.

Carl Raschke: Alright, great. John, I'm not moderating here, I'm just introducing people, so when we start engaging each other I'll turn it over to you. But we'll start with our staff and I want to first ask Joshua Ramos, who's the special projects editor for Whitestone Publications. I can tell you, full disclosure, He and Jason were both Ph.D. students at the same time. Actually, I know Josh, we go all the way back to when we were part of a little post-modern church together back in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. So, Josh, do you want to start off by saying something about this issue?

Joshua Ramos: Hi, yes, thank you very much for having me on board. I guess everything that was just said was brilliant and I'll try to add something. I don't have much more to add, but some of my thoughts are just finally on the question, "what use is it for evangelicalism?" I think for the American evangelical scene, you could try to say I'm a little skeptical of its use insofar as how it's being presented. Some of my questions with CRT is that it's very much tied in with a lot of these other upheaving political movements in our culture right now, and you have to analytically distinguish a lot of these threads that it just gets jumbled in.

For instance, Black Lives Matter. You have this project, you also have Nicole Hannah jones and the 1619 project, and you have very many different threads that you sort of lump sum it all together. Since the George Floyd riots of last year, caused lots of damage created in many cities, in many poor cities. That right there was when the emergence of BLM really became a thing and then critical race theory sort of dovetailed on it, even though it was a part of academia long ago, since the 70s. But now it's more in the form of public discourse where everybody knows about it. So, there is a knee-jerk reaction to it.

It would need basically a lot more PR, a lot better communication. I think that this notion of CRT, it started off basically on a bad foot for its public presence. And you know, first impressions count the most. Well, its first impressions are

with massive political evils in the American culture, so as for as like evangelicalism as a whole, of course that goes into how we define it and what it means. But for some global evangelicalism, Latin American evangelicals, evangelicals outside of the United States, that might be another issue too. A lot of Latin American evangelicalism might be a little conservative compared to the progressivism that is starting to characterize American style evangelicalism.

This is sort of creating that rift between old style evangelicalism and new school, which really takes off from the emergent church and has really evolved into the prima facie of progressive evangelicalism. So, I think there would be also the problem of trying to communicate CRT with evangelicals outside of the United States, which may skew more towards rejecting it. Because if it gets identified with Marxist theory, for instance like the Cuban Americans, they voted very conservative during the election because anything that has to do with Che or Communism, they just want to get away from and so there would be perhaps substantial pushback coming from global evangelicalism in this sense. So that's just all I want to add.

Carl Raschke: Good. And now, Alyssa, are you there?

Alyssa Putzer: Yep, I'm here.

Carl Raschke: Okay, she can introduce herself but let me just say, she has kind of been the sparkplug for, including designing the logo, for the Difficult Discussion initiative, and so I just want to give her credit for that, for sort of being the inspiration to do a lot of this.

Alyssa Putzer: Thank you. So, my name is Alyssa; I'm a second-year MA student at the University of Denver in the Religious Studies department. I guess what I really wanted to talk about was, I read *Removing the Stain of Racism in the Southern Baptist Convention* and it talked a lot about the fact that racism in religion began with this notion of original sin.

Keeping that in mind, and the fact that Christianity is kind of looking for ways to mitigate and atone for sins, can we look at racism in the concept of critical race theory in the same way, as a way of atoning for that original sin. And I think my question is probably more for Jason, but if we look at this concept that the Southern Baptist Convention is historically rooted in this idea of original sin and the evangelical churches, primarily white males,

can change actually happen within the institution if the institution is the problem?

Carl Raschke: Alright, thank you. Dianna Able, who, by the way, is the assistant editor for the Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory.

Dianna Able: Yes, hi, I'm Dianna. I'm also a second-year master's student with the Religious Studies department. Most of my research on this was on the history of evangelicalism. So, I would like to think I'm well versed in the American history of it and how it's been involved with different aspects of politics and popular media leading up to the huge conflagration that we see today with all of the controversy. And so, I really wanted to hear more from Soong Chan Rah about how the progressive thread of evangelicalism kind of adapted to and is analyzing CRT in a positive way, because that's something I didn't come across in my research. So, if we have time, I'd love to hear you talk a little bit more about that.

Carl Raschke: Okay, guys if you are doing notes on what they're wanting you to talk about, I know you love to talk, we all love to talk. We're academics; it's why we're in the business. So, we'll get back to that. Thank you, Dianna. All right. So, next on the list would be Jared Lacy, who's the assistant editor to The New Polis.

Jared Lacy: Hi, I'm Jared Lacy. I'm also a second-year master's student at the Religious Studies program at DU. So, my research was looking at the foundations of the concept of race in terms of slavery and also certain Calvinist history to that as well. I read, Achille Mbembe's *Necropolitics* and Robin Blackburn's *The Making of New World Slavery*. I won't quote from those extensively, but that's kind of informing what I'm talking about here.

So, in spite of critical race theory's claim of rejecting racial essentialism, it is largely perceived as essentialist by the media and its many critics. Conservative pundits frequently associate white guilt with the notion of original sin. However, as I mentioned, critical race theory explicitly rejects this racial essentialism. It might be said, though, that critical race theory's attempt to radically critique the liberal order falls short on account of what could be understood, not as racial essentialism, but in essentializing of racism as the primary factor in Western modernity's system of deciding who is human and who is not,

who's worthy of life and who deserves to die. Achille Mbembe calls this necropolitics.

Though as Robin Blackburn suggests in her book, *The Making of New World Slavery*, while the concept of race as a central criterion for deciding who is human and who is subhuman may have been somewhat novel to the advent of the modern world, the more important deciding factor may be the commodification of humanity, and inhumanity. In other words, it's more the commercial element than the racial element of the slave trade that distinguishes slavery in the modern world to previous examples of slavery.

The result is that even though we have seen some great strides in the civil rights movement toward racial equality, as Richard Delgado points out in *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, these achievements have not succeeded in eliminating what we today commonly refer to as structural racism. So instead of turning towards the kinds of concepts that critical race theory attributes this to, things like microaggressions and implicit bias, we need to look beyond racism, perhaps for the root causes that have made racism possible.

Even if we were to succeed in correcting implicit biases and eliminating microaggressions when it comes to race, we would still have those structures that not only make them possible, but might even make them necessary. And so, I think in terms of the question of whether or not critical race theory is the most beneficial tool, I think maybe it is a very useful tool for Christian evangelicalism because the alternative of what I was looking at, in many ways, might be much scarier to the Christian evangelical than critical race theory. So, we do need something and I think that critical race theory is a good start, but probably not sufficient.

Carl Raschke: Thank you. Our next participant is Kev Graine. I believe Kev has also had some kind of pastoral experience, and he's a new part of the editorial team. He's been working very much on doing research for this area. So Kev?

Kev Grane: Yeah, absolutely. So, I'm a first-year master's student out here at the University of Denver on the critical theory track. Kind of what my thought has been on a critical race theory is, I think it's been great to sort of alert the evangelical church as to maybe some of the subconscious biases that we have as we do ministry. But one thing that has kind of stuck out that I would love to hear more about, if any of you have ministerial

experience or just have thoughts on the idea, is that on a functional level, it seems to me that the solution for this racial issue that we seem to have, is not, as Martin Luther would say, that this equality, this "I have a dream," is not equality for all races.

Instead, it's almost going to the opposite direction and going into this term of anti-racism and giving some sort of special privilege or attention to minorities in order to atone for past transgressions. Now, as an evangelical myself, I'd say where I sometimes might have a little bit of an issue with this is that it seems to imply that there is some sort of sin that is not covered in the sacrifice of Christ. Basically, Christ covers all the multitude of sins with the exception of the sins of past generations, these transgressions that they have brought about against minorities in the past, now leading me, as an evangelical, to have to atone for those sins of the past.

Now that becomes problematic because within much evangelical Christian theology, Christ covers all sins and we don't have to atone for any of those. And furthermore, throughout the Bible there's never really any instance of someone having to atone for a lot of the sins of their forefathers. I mean, one's called to be responsible for the sins of themselves, but you're not persecuted or punished for the sins of your forefathers. So that's sort of the general issue that I seem to see with critical race theory as it applies on a functional level to the Christian evangelical. So, if you guys have any thoughts, I would love to hear more about sort of what you think.

Carl Raschke: Rachel Foley. Rachel, you there?

Rachel Foley: Hi, I'm Rachel. I studied the historical aspects of critical race theory itself and it just started in law school. I read the book *Critical Race Theory* by Delgado and it talked about the different laws and the different things that were happening at the time that the law students were looking at and thinking about how they were not racially fair. So, I'm really disturbed by what critical race theory has become in the media and just in the U.S. in general. I guess because it became politically charged again, probably in Spring/Summer of 2020 with the George Floyd riots and protests and Black Lives Matter being put to the head of the political sphere.

It was never intended to be something like what it has become; it wasn't supposed to be a divisive word or anything like that. It was just supposed to be saying that things haven't

always been free or fair or equal in the legal system. So, I think as far as evangelicalism is concerned, it would behoove Christianity to kind of get behind critical race theory, or at least to think of something similar to teach people, to teach America the things that happened in the country that we're ashamed of. And that's really what the word critical race theory is, as a stand in for that. It's just like any history that we don't want to look at and actually the history that we don't want to look at is the history that's kind of most important and the stuff that really gonna come back to haunt us. So that's all.

Carl Raschke: Thank you, and last simply because his last name begins with Y, is Suhayb Yunus. He's on our team as well. Suhayb, are you there?

Suhayb Yunus: Can you hear me? So, there were two things that I think were brought up that were really essential. One was by Dr. Rah, I think. He mentioned proxy war, either you or Dr. Coley. And the other one was by Dr. Alvis, I think, and that had to do with the relationship with CRT to critical theory or the German thinkers in the Post War period. So, I think the in first to deal with the latter, I think that, as academics, we have an inclination to pull the discussion back into what is more familiar, what's more in our bailiwick, right? What's more in our domain?

So, we want to make the points or clarify that CRT isn't really a critical theory in itself. However, I think for the conservatives, the genetic link between CRT and critical theory is not in methodology. It's in perspective and I think that's something that Dr. Alvis was kind of alluding to. And so that, I think, is critical in really establishing our position in the discussion because it's going to simply add another voice to the den if we're trying to force what is ultimately a social discussion about a term that is being used in an effective way, in a colloquial way, rather than in a technical way, into a jargonized discussion that really has nothing to do with what people are talking about.

So, do we want our position to be within the discussion where we're participating, or do we want to pull people into our own discussions in, you know, the halls of academia, which other people don't want to do, right? But that's going to completely change the dynamics of the conflict, and is that really what we want to do? The second thing is the proxy war which is related, I think, but it seems to me that no one actually cares about CRT. Fundamentally, it's not about CRT; it's about other things: CRT or the conflict about CRT, the dynamic of each side in there, in

the animus and the antagonism. It's loaded with other feelings of optimization of just this general tribalist animus that is continually and progressively fulminating, and being sort of exacerbated by the vagaries of life.

And there are questions about what is by design. How beneficial is conflict to things like profit? If you look at the Occupy Wall Street movement, where there was the division that we see now, then when you had just the 99% against the 1%. If you looked at the photos of the people that were protesting, it was exactly the people that are fighting against each other now, but they found themselves bound together by the common purpose and the common feeling of exploitation. So how much of this tribalism is distracting from overarching issues that are more fundamental and actually at the roots of the things that people are up in arms about in the first place?

Carl Raschke: Okay, thank you, Suhayb. Now John, I'm going to turn it over to you for the second hour, which will be responses and discussion. This is where the role of the moderator really comes in.

John Zivojinovic: So, I think there were several questions that were asked to different professors. If you want to respond, I think each person from Whitestone definitely asked some questions. So, who would like to jump in? Scott, how about you? You want to jump in and address one I think that Rachel mentioned.

Scott Coley: So, the question that stood out to me as something that I might fruitfully address, I believe, came from Kev, but maybe there's some connections to others. To this point about collective guilt or guilt for past sins, etc., I see this come up fairly often in conversations among conservative evangelicals. I think it's really important to distinguish guilt, on the one hand, to owing restitution, on the other hand, right? And I'll just start by saying that when the electric company sends me a bill, I don't get the bill and say, "Well, I didn't do anything wrong." Or, I'm not going to get out my checkbook and write "Jesus paid it all" and mail that back in.

Point being, it's one thing to say that I, by virtue of my membership in a particular group, namely white guys, I am guilty for stuff that was done long before I was born. Now some people want to press that argument and say that there is a sort of collective guilt that traces back over time and so on. To be honest with you, I don't fully understand that, so I'm not going to

address it one way or another. It just doesn't make sense to me, but I certainly don't think that's true. On the other hand, it can be the case that I'm not guilty for anything that happened before my birth or that I had no agency in, and I can still look around and acknowledge that the median white family has like 1000% more wealth than the median black family, and say well, *that didn't just happen*.

There were institutions that were set up to do this, and we are looking at the echoes of those – the reverberations of those policies in the present day, right now. There may be interesting questions of transitional justice about how exactly we rectify this wrong. But I think it's important to make the conceptual distinction between saying there's something that's owed versus you're guilty of something that your ancestors did or something. Does that make sense?

John Zivojinovic: Yeah, unpack that a little more, Dr. Coley, because it can be a little ambiguous.

Scott Coley: Okay, so suppose that my grandfather stole $40,000 from your grandfather. And just for the sake of simplicity, let's say that it was cash. Never mind why your grandfather had $40,000 in cash. Let's suppose it was his legitimately. Okay. And my grandfather put that money in a safety deposit box, so it's right there. So, my grandfather owes your grandfather $40,000 because he stole it from him. Well, suppose your grandfather then dies, leaving his entire estate, again for the sake of simplicity, to one heir which is your dad. Okay, well that $40,000 debt then passes, that IOU passes from your grandfather to your dad. Right? I'm not talking in the context of whether would this be actionable in court. We're talking like just a big J Justice here.

John Zivojinovic: I think we don't want to get lost in it, you were talking about institutional and then you gave a very personal application. So, keep it in the context of this institution because that may help us understand repayment or whatever, and what that looks like.

Scott Coley: Excellent. So, it's clear how the debt would transfer from one generation to another, even if there's no wrongdoing by the later generation. That's clear in this personal case; I'm going to bring it to institutions now, as long as we're clear on this point. So, take the Federal Housing Administration in 1934, from 1934-1968. 1968 wasn't that long ago. Bob Dylan was almost 40; that guy is still cutting albums. I haven't heard

them, I don't know if they're any good, but he's still putting them out there. Okay, so the Federal Housing Administration, as a matter of law, not only permitted racial discrimination in housing, it mandated racial discrimination in housing.

So, people of color were effectively barred from owning desirable real estate. The book *Color of Law* goes into great detail so I won't reiterate all the details there, but we're broadly familiar with redlining. Well, as it turns out, during the span of time when basically the U.S. government created the white middle class through a program of mortgage insurance that made it possible for banks to lend money to folks buying houses in the suburbs. None of that would have been possible had it not been underwritten by everyone, right? So, everyone, all Americans are paying into this system, this insurance system, that subsidizes the purchase of real estate, which then increases in value by about $200,000. The median piece of property, just by living in a home and making your mortgage payment, you would have gotten about $200,000 richer from say the 1940s to the end of the 1960s.

That's like $200,000 that the U.S. government just gave to white middle-class families, and the number one way that Americans accumulate and transfer wealth from one generation to the next is through home equity. I don't care what Dave Ramsey says, okay? Is it possible to just save up your money, and get rich? I don't know, maybe, but nobody does that. Of course, we're not talking about the Waltons, right, they've got hedge funds. Where 90% of Americans transfer wealth from one generation to the next do it through home equity and that's it. So, we sort of show, again, the retribution, the justice that needs to take place is that at the governmental level where we need it because that's an institution that probably you and I can't impact. So, I think the least provocative way to frame it is to say that the U.S. government misallocated these funds and the U.S. government needs to make restitution.

John Zivojinovic: Okay, and so restitution, is that a paycheck?

Scott Coley: There are different proposals. I think Rothstein, in *The Color of Law,* gives an interesting proposal. The government buys real estate in certain neighborhoods as it becomes available in the free market and then sells it to people of color at the rate, adjusted for inflation, that it would have been when the house was built. Who picks up the tab for that? Well,

you could, say, draw it out of taxes, you could set up a program where people are free to donate and it would be tax deductible.

Well, there would be a nice symmetry in that the mortgage interest deduction has been available to some folks and not others. I mean, there are various proposals. As I say, there are interesting questions of transitional justice about how exactly you do this, but it's important to note there's nothing antithetic to Christianity, or antithetic to the message of forgiveness, about saying that a debt is owed and it needs to be paid. Right?

John Zivojinovic: Well, I think you make a great point, but again, I think where some Christians kind of muddy the waters is where you need to feel personal guilt for an institutional offense, and then I think that's where it runs awry. So, the question that was asked of Dr. Alvis, do you want to answer that question? So, a different one, we'll come back to this, in case anyone wants to comment. But I think we want to try to answer some of the questions that were posed. So, are you with us in Germany?

Jason Alvis: Yeah, I'm here. I'm with you. So, the question I believe maybe you're referencing is the one from Alyssa and that was a very provocative question about the corrupt institutions, namely the Southern Baptist Convention. And I think maybe summarizing the question is "is change possible in corrupted institutions?" What can be done in these corrupt institutions? So, Alyssa was mentioning, quite rightly, the takeover of white males. There's obviously a current purge, if you pay much attention to the news, taking place in the leadership in the SBC. They had their big meeting not too long ago this year, maybe five months ago.

And of the symptoms of the problems that we're seeing, critical race theory being one of the cowbells, we're hearing those bells ringing much louder now. To try to address that question, *is change possible in corrupt institutions?* if I were a scholar of critical race theory—which I do not see myself as being—I would say yes; change is possible. But then the question becomes, where specifically should we place our optimism in that change?

So, in certain ways, you also see a certain optimistic theological anthropology of those who are in the SBC and those who hold to a more conservative, says Baptist theology, a very highly positive, optimistic anthropology, which is not just, Jesus saves you from your sins and you're a changed person, and you can do anything/everything possible. It's actually a real possibility of being able to receive the gospel, and then to change.

So, it's not just that God does the changing, does the salvific work, so to speak, but that the person also is able to change in cooperation, in participation with God.

So that's one way of seeing the optimism. That's where the optimism is placed. But again, back to the point of critical race theory, the optimism of critical race theory and some of those roots that I mentioned earlier of Enlightenment philosophy from Kant and others, it's a full belief, full 100% belief in the human project in the possibility that humans can change. They need guardrails, but they can change and one of the ways to do that, is that critical race theory perceives and attempts to implement, especially at the institutional governmental level, which is quite different from the ecclesial governmental level, so to speak.

But one of the ways to do that is to set up guardrails within the institution so that powers can be limited. Domination, tyranny, and these different forms of nasty authority can be limited, so that way not only do others have voices, but others are able to speak up when there's a certain social wrong that's going on. So, listen, I'm trying to answer your question, I'm kind of spinning around here. I'd say for critical race theorists, change is possible, even though the critical race theorists would look at an institution like the Southern Baptist Convention and often gaffe and not know what to do with it and would be very frustrated with it. I think they would still, deep down in their heart of hearts, say change is possible. It's just a question of where and how and to what degree is that optimism placed.

John Zivojinovic: So, Jason, if you would unpack maybe two or three, maybe a little bit more practical ways, that change is possible. I mean, it's nice, it can kind of be a little slogan, but what are two or three ways? You know, you said it's not dominating, which is kind of theoretical. What would be practical ways that you could maybe advocate for change?

Jason Alvis: Well, I tried to address the three ways that critical race theory can be helpful for the church, and I would not presume to act as if I have a voice in the political arena, first of all in the German context or in the American context, so I don't have much to say about those institutions and changing those institutions, but I would say as someone who's been a part of Christian churches, these are places where I do believe I've had some kind of voice, and I would say those three points—reaching out, reaching in, and reaching up—critical race theory can be helpful. Critical race theory can help us develop solidarity against division. It can help us for institutional investigation, and

it can help us consider missional engagement in a new and different world. I think those things are possible and it sounds, in certain ways, a little abstract and a little bit ethereal and maybe too cheap, perhaps, and I think others can critique it. I'd say that's my main position.

Zohn Zivojinovic: Do you feel like that was answered clearly?

Alyssa Putzer: I do think so. My perspective was kind of less of the theological perspective and more of I guess, maybe a political-social perspective, especially through the lens of something like colonialism where, you know, how can a group of people who are the root of the problem also be the ones that solve that problem? But I think coming from a theological perspective, I think that definitely answers the question.

John Zivojinovic: Again, that's a legitimate question that you gave. Let's go to the next one; Dianna had a question. Dianna, who did you direct a question to?

Dianna Able: I wanted to hear more from Dr. Rah about the progressive movement and how they are kind of looking at CRT in a positive light, how they are wrestling with all of these ideas and imminent changes.

John Zivojinovic: There you go, Dr. Rah.

Soong-Chan Rah: So, the progressive thread, if you look at the previous generation that emerges in the 1970s with the Chicago Declaration and with publications like *Sojourners*, institutions like ESA, CCDA, etc., that generation – you know now they're now in their 60s, 70s, and 80s—you get them responding affirmatively around critical race theory. You get that a lot of that community is now identified as ex-evangelical in many places as well. But what's interesting is evangelicals of color who identify—and I would fall into this camp—more with the progressive evangelical school. So, you know a lot of it has been... we've had to defend ourselves constantly from this kind of like name calling—your CRT, your Marxist—Straw Man argument, that's come up before.

Some of my African American colleagues, whom I would consider to be progressive evangelicals—in other words, staunchly evangelical, but more socially politically progressive—would say, "look, these ideas that you're talking about, that you're accusing me of, I didn't get them from CRT. I got them from the Bible. Or I got them from my church history, having

been part of the Black Church all my life. These ideas about oppression and structural issues, I never read a book by CRT, I just lived my life in the Black Church, or lived my life as a black man or black woman."

So, I kind of made a joke meme on Facebook, about seven months ago, where I posted that I had just ordered from Amazon two key books on critical race theory and I said, "I've been accused of this. I just want to know what I'm being accused of." So that's where some of that response has been. In many cases, we do understand critical race theory, but a lot of our sourcing on this of how we understand race and racial dynamics is really coming, for us, from scripture, theology, our heritage, and our story.

So, I can give you some names of individuals. There are a couple of works by Nelson Cardigania at Wheaton College, who has done a number of interviews. He's a critical race theorist, but he also teaches at an evangelical school. Jeff Liu and Robert Chao Romero, again one Asian, one Latino-Asian, who are evangelicals of color that are currently writing a book on an evangelical response to critical race theory in a more favorable light. These are evangelicals who are progressive socially and politically, but if you were to examine their theology, you would find that they're more on the conservative end there in terms of their theology and their affiliations, Wheaton College, etc. Their affiliations are evangelical.

But I do want to add a comment to what was said a little bit earlier because, Dr. Coley, I love your comments about this distinction between this individual understanding and this kind of social structural understanding, and this is a problem. This is a theologically rooted problem. What I've written about is that American evangelical theology is so hyper-individualistic it stops looking at the Bible and it starts looking at society as a whole, which is hyper-individualistic. And so even the word guilt, I've said in a number of settings, I don't like the phrase white guilt because it is not sufficient, not because it makes me upset or anything like that. It's an inadequate term because guilt, the way I would understand it, is an individualistic kind of western concept of how one feels when an individual does something wrong.

And so, I don't use the phrase, *white guilt*, not because it offends people, but because it's not strong enough. It's not sufficient. What CRT actually does is it actually raises the possibility, not of white guilt but, I would argue, white shame

and the differentiation between guilt and shame culture. Guilt is you feel bad about something you've done, and therefore you could go to God and confess that and get healing and salvation from God. That's very much an American evangelical faith, "I feel bad about using the N-word twenty years ago, so I'm going to do something now to make up for it. I'm gonna take the King holiday off and go golfing." That's my active retribution as an individual to make up for my white guilt.

Shame, on the other hand, and this is kind of an Asian cultural dynamic that I grew up in, is not just you feel bad about something you've done, but you feel bad for your setting. You feel bad about your identity, which is a very different theological starting point. As a theologian, I would look at that and say, well, the Bible is really more about shame than it is about guilt, our identity is brokenness and sinfulness, not just our individual actions. So, if we start talking about white shame, now we've got a whole different level, and that's the problem of CRT for evangelicals. It's not an easy way out.

Guilt is an easy way out. To say, "Okay, I feel guilty about being white and therefore I'm going to change. I feel guilty about something I did as an individual, therefore I'm going to do a positive action now." White shame is "no, my community, my society that I've participated in, my identity; damn, there is a shame to that because there's a brokenness there" and that is not so easily resolved. And our white American evangelical theology as Jason was mentioning, doesn't have the parameters, the vocabulary to understand this type of brokenness and sinfulness.

John Zivojinovic: Very good.

Scott Coley: Can I piggyback on that a little bit?

John Zivojinovic: Just for about two minutes.

Scott Coley: Won't even take that long.

John Zivojinovic: Okay great, go ahead.

Scott Coley: I think that there is a total absence of an understanding of the moral salience of institutions. Morality is the sort of moral horizon tethered to individual piety, that's it. There's something here that may be obvious. When I first started paying attention to these conversations, I noticed people talking about how justice is somehow antithetical to Christianity. I thought they were lying and that it was in bad faith and then I realized they actually believe this. And I think the fundamental

divide that we're seeing is between people who see morality as fundamentally a matter of certain kinds of social hierarchy and authority and submission, versus those who see morality as a matter of objective truth about what people deserve and what we owe to each other as human beings.

And I actually do think that those who see morality, and there are all sorts of things we could say about ideology and legitimizing myths and how this gets built into the gospel that is preached among those who preach the gospel, but the folks on the hierarchy side, they really don't want justice. They really can't get down with CRT because for them, the hierarchy is legitimate and that's as it should be. I'm not one of those, in case that's not obvious.

John Zivojinovic: Jason, you can go ahead and add to that, please?

Jason Alvis: Yeah, awesome. I want to follow that view, Scott, and switch on this view of the problem of autonomy versus say heteronomy that we see especially in more right-leaning, evangelical-leaning churches. I would also add, though, that many of these churches have a very strong authoritative structure. I recently checked out a book by Owen Strahan, if you're looking for an excellent symptom of white guilt—white shame and white guilt, as you mentioned so excellently—check out this book because it is a perfect picture of how the problem is not racism. The problem is the feeling of being pointed at as flawed, as humanly flawed. And that's something we don't like to experience.

But anyway, Strahan, in his book, references this matter of church authority. The problem is not, for him, individuals holding these beliefs, the problem is when authority members of these churches, of these ecclesial communities, start to hold these beliefs because that starts to corrupt the flock, so to speak. So, you do have this big overarching, institutional perspective, maybe even bigger than critical race theory could ever imagine or dream of in that social sense. But it's just, I would say, a misplaced kind of authority structure.

John Zivojinovic: Very well. And we're going to get to Jared's question here in a second, but I think Scott, I think another thing, theologically, that happens is that a lot of evangelicals believe the things of this world government, the social structure are of the enemy—it's a lost cause. The only thing that's really redeemable is the individual, and that adds to this

bifurcation of the individual or the autonomous versus the heteronomous concept, but I think you're right. The institutional thing needs to be evaluated from the theological lens, going back to Dr. Rah's comments. I think it's just brilliant and insightful. The whole notion of shame is a really good concept. With that in mind, Jared, go ahead and restate your question. And who was it for?

Jared Lacy: It wasn't really for anybody specifically, but it is, within evangelicalism, if we eliminate the elements of racial othering, are there not still more fundamental elements of othering that would need to be addressed? Elements are not necessarily inherent to Christianity, but inherent to the Christian church in the modern world.

John Zivojinovic: Dr. Rah, do you have anything that you'd like to say on that?

Soong-Chan Rah: Sure. I mentioned this in some of the vocabulary I was using in my opening remarks about this Christian anthropologist who taught at Fuller for many years, Paul Hiebert. He talks about the distinction between a bounded set and a centered set. Then I used the term truth-pursuit and truth-possessed. So, this is most notable in the fundamentalist thread, but also very evident in the reformed and Pentecostal threads as well and therefore shapes the neo-evangelical thread.

What you see, I would argue, is that there's kind of a Western philosophical argument, which is the idea that there are insiders and there are outsiders. There is a bounded set within which we count as those inside, and there is something outside of that. So, for me as a professor of evangelism, when I look at the threads of how evangelism has been viewed, for example the doctrine of discovery, what you saw was what we can take Africans as slaves, we can conquer the New World and kind of wipe out the native civil nations because this is our act of evangelism. Because we are the insiders, and they are the outsiders. We are made in the image of God, and they are not. We are imbued by the spirit of God to go and be the light and salt into the world, and these others are not.

So, this concept of otherness is most evident, I think, in our society right now around the issue of race. But it's also evident, obviously around issues of gender and the exclusion of women in leadership, and in many of these kinds of more conservative circles, when we talk about race it's not just African Americans. You see this in the historical Native American treatment, and

obviously, the images that we've seen recently on the border towards Haitians, South Americans, and Latin Americans, and Central Americans.

These narratives you play over and over again, the Japanese internment, Chinese Exclusion Act, are all aspects of othering. This is speculation on my part, but there is some evidence here that white American evangelicalism has gotten to the point that it is today, and maybe to a level of success or mixed results about where they've arrived, is that it's played that game really well. It's played that game of insider-outsider really, really well, to such an extent that even those who are on the outside who've been excluded, when they're invited into the inside of white evangelicalism, there's an embracing of that.

And I'm not going to name names, but I've kind of fallen into that trap myself where, by going to the evangelical institutions of the seminaries, the parachurch organizations, and denominations, evangelicals of color can be invited in. But as Willie Jennings points out, salvific viability for many Western Christians is based upon one approximation of whiteness. And so that othering takes on another level when you can bring in folks to your inside group.

But then, those voices are the voices you hear. These are the voices that agree with you. CRT is evil and it could be a black voice that says, oh, we got to stop immigration. It could be a Latino voice that says that. So, that insider/outsider has been demarcated by race very frequently. But there is also the "we'll accept you into the inside," and there's the pressure "as long as you play by these rules."

John Zivojinovic: Thank you, Dr. Rah. Joshua, do you have anything you'd like to add to that?

Joshua Ramos: I don't disagree with Soong Chan on this issue. I think my experience has been this: that bottom line, I think this insider/outsider issue, in my opinion, seems to be less often about race than it is the idea. And the reason I say this is because your skin color matters less if you disagree, right? And so, you have this epithet called Uncle Tom, right? And it immediately is thrown out the minute, if you're of the same color but of a different opinion, it's not out there, right?

I don't know. I guess Uncle Tom applies to all races, but I don't know where, as a Mexican American. It strikes me as skin color is convenient when it suits you, but when it doesn't suit

you, then it's meaningless; I think that tends to be the rub in the centers of color that have a contrarian opinion, right? So then what? It becomes more about the idea of the color of the skin, so that's all I want to add.

Carl Raschke: Can I say something, John? Because some of these people that are here are students that were reading some literature that I gave them. And Jared had a very interesting point that I think is kind of getting slighted right here. And, before I go to say that, there's one thing that I think is lacking in all these conversations, even at the academic level as it is a sufficient understanding of the nuances in the historical context in which these issues arise. I won't go into the genealogy of critical race theory, but the term critical race theory all of a sudden gets thrown out as less than this object we all sort of know what it talks about. It becomes a marker and I want to use this term marker because it's a sociological term.

Jared talked about the African critical theorist Achille Mbembe, that's what he is, and he's very well-known in our field. In fact, I think Jason is doing a project this year that involves him. a very insightful thinker. You know, he's a philosopher, he's academic but very insightful. One of Mbembe's points that he makes not only in *Necropolitics*, but in a later book which is called *A Critique of Black Reason*, is that the relationship between religion and outsiderness and race, historically—particularly in the 17th century—because of the necessity of commodifying people that are African slaves, it wasn't the fact that African slaves were brought to America just simply because white people were prejudice, they really didn't have an idea.

We had already wiped out the Native American population primarily through disease, but also through exploitation, which was essentially genocide, and so to satisfy—Underwood really talks about how this worked—growing consumer demand for two commodities, tobacco and sugar and later coffee—all which were grown best within the Caribbean, not in North America so much as in the Caribbean—you had to have massive levies of cheap or free labor. It was that economic necessity that forced not only the slave system, but also the Africanization of which slaves had already existed in Africa, and a lot of this had to do with the distinction between Muslims and infidels, who would have penetrated into Africa.

What Mbembe points out is that the marker "well you're religiously different" whether you're an infidel from a Muslim point of view or you're a pagan from a Christian point of view,

and that idea that Soong-Chan mentioned, the fact that we're all made in the image of God. But in the 17th century, which really goes back in, many ways, to Constantinian Christianity, this kind of otherness is that we're going to teach, going to preach the gospel; if you don't accept it, then you know it's your fault, so, therefore, you're not Christian. You're not human. In other words, you've got to be Christian, in the formal sense of going through the sacraments or even going down to the altar in the modern sense, to be human.

So, what Mbembe points out, and other writers like this have done this as well, is that marker, which was essentially a religious marker now because of the commodification, the necessity of commodification, it becomes a racial marker. And that racial marker becomes, in itself, a kind of essentialist property that becomes part of the cognitive framework, the deep framework in which people are understood, and so forth. These systems have been in place because of that kind of differentiation.

We need to look at Jim Crow and understand how it was more than just discrimination – it was the creation of a whole perceptual and cognitive system. And we do that today, ironically over critical race theory. I think the point Josh just made about how you're in the club or you're not. You may be of different color skin, but you don't have the right attitudes, therefore, you're not a real black person or you're not a real Asian, and so forth. The fact of the matter is, there are a lot of contradictions here.

You know everybody said that it was about the white Trumpists and evangelicals versus the world. Statistically, that's not true at all. If one wants to face these kinds of problems and contradictions, you really need to come to the talk on Tuesday by Professor Kaufman because he's going to lay out data and statistics to show how people's attitudes, which we call racial, really have to do with a lot of different kinds of markers and perceptions and orientations that aren't inherently or initially racial. But race becomes a kind of universal marker to kind of make it easy to sort, and that's what I think is missing in all these conversations. How are we doing this sorting process? So that's all I have to say.

John Zivojinovic: That was excellent, thanks. I did want to ask Suhayb: did you want to direct a question to anyone? You had some comments, and I didn't know if maybe you had a question.

Suhayb Yunus: No, I didn't really have a direct question. It's more of general point.

John Zivojinovic: Well taken and well spoken, so good job, but did you have anything out of that you would like to kind of vet out a little bit more?

Suhayb Yunus: Carl said a lot of what I wanted to get addressed. The history of racism in America is in large a part of the chapter of the history of economics, and we have to see things in a broader context if we're going to talk about historicity, which a lot of this is about, right? So, I guess if I had a question, or if I could condense what you said earlier into two questions.

I think it was Dr. Rah who mentioned the proxy war, or maybe I'm getting that wrong, but whoever did maybe speak to how the conflict can be perceived as a sort of red herring deployed by tribalism and the other question, I would ask to maybe Dr. Alvis, is the issue of communication and our own position. How do you see, kind of trying to frame the debate and catch everybody's different terms and definitions corresponding to our own kind of self-determined position, as messianic figures descending from the Ivory tower to kind of arbitrate what's going on?

John Zivojinovic: So was it you, Dr. Rah, that spoke of the proxy war?

Soong-Chan Rah: I think it was actually Dr. Coley, but you know it's a similar language. I've used a straw man and we talked about that as, "well, where you're kind of creating a straw man." That's a pretty accurate description of what's happening. You lump everything into this word, and it doesn't really mean what it means anymore. So, if I talk to people who are kind of antagonistic to critical race theory, and I ask them, "well, what do you think it actually is?" Most will not be able to answer that question. So this is part of the dynamics of a culture war where something like cognitive theory, which is the embodied experience of the narrative and language, is more powerful than the facts themselves.

When I originally got the invitation, I thought this was for this group... there's some work by the Harvard Negotiating Group called Difficult Conversations and one of the things they identify is the three levels of communication: facts, feelings, and identity. I think what happened in a proxy war is that facts don't

matter. Feelings matter, but at the end of it, it's like you're assaulting my identity and so all of CRT kind of gets wrapped up in this identity of a Christian, not just as a white person, "as a Christian, I feel offended." So, that is, I think, a lot of that kind of proxy war language does, this kind of putting everything into this straw man and then saying, "we can beat this thing because if we made it into this kind of proxy war for what it represents, the evil that is already in our system."

John Zivojinovic: Okay, well thank you for that elucidation of the straw man. Now let's go to Dr. Coley. Would you like to talk on the proxy war and unpack that a little bit more for us?

Dr. Coley: So we've gotten into, I think, some real sort of higher-order questions about ideology and myths of legitimizing the social hierarchy. When it comes to the sense in which CRT is a proxy war, I'm afraid the particulars are a lot less interesting than some of the stuff we're talking about because it's so convoluted that it's confusing when you first encounter it, right? So, here's the formula—some critical race theorists say some things that are provocative, right? And so, folks will go and find provocative quotes from some critical race theorists and say look, this is critical race theory. So, first of all, that's bizarre, right?

I mean, we're all academics here, and I'm a philosopher. Do you go find something weird that a philosopher says and say, "hey, this is philosophy!"? No, not at all. So that's step one; you find some provocative things—"Look, this is critical race theory"—and then you just slap that label on discussions around race, and you know it's Marxism or cultural Marxism or whatever. Although the mention of Marxism, I'm coming to find, there is a kernel of truth to that, at least in the minds of those who make this kind of move. If you think that life is about hierarchy and submission to authority, this is where you see racism and misogyny kind of come together, right?

If you think that that's what morality is really about, then you might think that any threat to that hierarchy that might have some kind of a leveling effect is in some sense Marxist. I mean there's a history there during the Cold War. The Soviets were really sort of pointing to the U.S. and saying look, they claim to be this free society, but look at how they treat women and look at how they treat people of color. Yeah, I mean there's a whole history there but some of these folks do seem to think that any kind of push for justice or equity is in some sense Marxist. I'm afraid it's just convoluted thinking with respect to how CRT is caricatured and then sort of packaged up and dismissed.

John Zivojinovic: Very good, thank you.

Soong-Chan Rah: Can I tell a kind of funny personal story about what Scott just said? A few months ago I gave a talk at an African American church that was attempting to do some healing between black and Asian communities on the heels of the Stop AAPI Hate movement. So, I did like a five-minute talk there, a sermon, and somebody, I think he was called like wokepreacher.com or something—he's kind of antagonistic to this whole movement around being woke, which is so interesting because the Bible actually says, "arise awake, oh Sleeper," and now we've got folks saying don't be awake, even though that's what the Bible actually tells us to do.

So, anyway, this person took this clip and, of course, YouTube metrics, the picture that they froze on is of a moment where it looks like I'm screaming at people. So, you have this really angry-looking Asian guy screaming at the audience, and that's where it froze on, and of course, that's what gets projected. So, they take either one snippet or even just a frozen face where I look really angry and say, "hey look, this is an angry Asian man who hates white people." So that does happen. It's not just the speculation of taking snippets here and there and saying this is what they represent. I personally have seen that actually happen.

John Zivojinovic: Okay very good, thanks for that. Sorry, that happened, but thanks for giving us that insight. Alyssa or Dianna, do you have any other questions? Anything you'd like to unpack additionally?

Alyssa Putzer: No, I don't think so.

John Zivojinovic: Okay, Alyssa, you're good. How about you, Dianna?

Dianna Able: Not off the top of my head; I had like a half-baked idea that I still haven't been able to form into a question, and that's how evangelicals would reconcile the idea that most of their church activities are based on missionary work when missionary work is more often than not tied with racist undertones? So, I've been trying g to make that into a question, but I can't figure out how to do so.

John Zivojinovic: Well, let's do this. For those of you that spoke, which is like Dr. Coley and Dr. Rah, those who were kind of asked to do a little. Could you come up with one or two practical things that we could take away, that people that watch this could take away from this? people who might be asking,

"how do we move in a direction that is helpful, healthy, and engaging? We've talked about kind of the antithesis, so how do we kind of bring it all together?"

So, let's go ahead and start, we're going to start with you, Dr. Rah. I'm going to give you about a minute or two because our time is quickly coming to an end. And then we're going to go to Dr. Coley, and then we're going to go to Dr. Alvis and we'll just kind of work through that. Then we'll go to Joshua. Just some practical things that you could give to us. With that in mind, Dr. Rah, you're on.

Soong-Chan Rah: Well, my area is in the area of practical theology, but I've got to be honest, I'm a little stumped about how this could work out. I will say that it's maybe typical for everything, when you embody something that counters what someone has so deeply believed, that's actually one of the counters to it. So, folks who have so deeply embodied this kind of antagonism and hatred, and it's kind of this knee-jerk reaction against all of these things.

If we're in a community, and if we're in a relationship that shows and demonstrates a counter to that, a healthy community, a reconciled community, a justice community, that to me is one of the counters in that we are actually, visibly embodying what Christ had intended, and it seems to counter the messages that they've heard. That's not very practical, but I think it's one of the more impactful ways to be.

John Zivojinovic: Actually, I think it is very important. Embody change if you want to not just talk about it, live it. And then also, potentially, connect with groups that really are addressing a holistic, healthy view of justice. So that's very precious, thank you. Dr. Coley, you're up.

Dr. Coley: Well, I teach philosophy, so I don't even pretend to be practical. I do want to say something about Dianna's point, though, about missions. So interestingly enough, the Southern Baptist Convention started because of a division over this question. A division with other Baptists over the question of whether or not someone who held slaves could be a missionary.

Of course, if your thinking on the matter is such that you see these human hierarchies as an expression of God's design, rather than a fact of human iniquity, then you see nothing wrong with enslaving people and going off to some other continent and preaching to people who look just like the people you've

enslaved. The gospel, it's a feature, it's not a bug. That's part of what makes a lot of this confusing. We're having different conversations, right? The gospel that some people are preaching has fully integrated these toxic things to do with race. Practically...

Dr. Zivojinovic: Just give us one thing.

Dr. Coley: I'll just speak from my own experience. I found a lot of the Hebrew Bible made basically no sense to me until I realized that it's about justice and then it all just clicked. It's like, wow, that's why God's mad. I mean idolatry, yes, but it's a close second. Often idolatry involves issues of justice. Once you realize that the Hebrew scriptures are about justice and a lot of the law is about justice, institutional justice, it just makes sense.

Then you go back, and you read the Exodus narrative. For me as a white guy, I'm like, "Oh, I'm not the Israelites in this story." Of course, it's dangerous to try to think that you've mapped neatly onto any of the cast, right? But insofar as I map onto any of the groups, like I'm the Egyptians. So practically speaking, I think that reading the Old Testament, sorry, the Hebrew scriptures with justice in view, can be a life-changing experience.

John Zivojinovic: Okay, that's practical. Thank you very much for that. Dr. Alvis, what do you have for us?

Jason Alvis: Well, I'm an even more complicated postmodern philosopher, so anything practical... Scott was a real practical philosopher just now, in everything he just said. It's hard for me to come up with anything.

John Zivojinovic: You're an official churchman, come on, you came up with three points.

Jason Alvis: Okay, well, I've got multiple identities. I think that maybe that's the point then, to move forward here, and develop more discussion on multiple identities. One thing that really is the bee in my bonnet is when I hear people talk about critical race theory, let's say as a particular worldview, for example, it drives me insane as if it's some cohesive specific worldview, or as if evangelicalism is one specific cohesive word. We're talking about major movements. I mean, we all participate in various language games pending upon our circumstances.

If I'm playing baseball, we all agree on the rules of baseball when we play. That's part of the game. I participate in secular

institutions just as much as my brothers and sisters in the U.S. just as much as they participate in secular institutions. Does that make me a secular father of secular theology? In some cases, maybe yes. In many cases, no. So, I think that's one way to lower the temperature in the room is to get away from this worldview perspective and try to see it as way to enter dialogue with brothers and sisters and people, human beings who have very similar interests as we do towards mission and justice, as Scott mentioned, right? That's probably where I would go.

John Zivojinovic: Good, that'll work. How about you, Joshua? What do you get for us?

Joshua Ramos: Sure thing, John. Well, I dovetail on everybody else's analysis, I'm just a theorist. It's like, practicality, what? Soong Chan Rah, he did practical theology. I guess I position myself as more of a critic, but a don't-throw-the-baby-out-with-the-bathwater kind of guy too, and I think this is where I tend to have to check myself because you guys read the Bible as being about justice, right?

I think a lot of the bathwater needs to be flushed out, but we still have to keep that precious pearl of the Biblical idea of justice and, whether it's been adopted by Marxists or whatever, we still have the commands of Christ, because, at the Final Judgement, you know the water, the visiting, the sick, those obviously stranger reckoning. How do we fill those commands of Christ without you know, necessarily, getting tangled with celebrityism and all of the noise on Twitter and the egos? Because there is a lot of that. I think you just have to kind of go back and try to lower the temperature a bit as Jason said and so basically, keep the baby but maybe flush out the bathwater.

John Zivojinovic: Okay, very good. So, what I hear from you all is embodiment needs to be not only personal but also communal. Take another look at the Hebrew Bible, i.e. the Old Testament, through the lens of justice, which, by the way, is an excellent insight. I've found that it's profound. Develop more discussions with different voices from our counterpart in Germany, that's excellent. And so, thank you very much. And just embrace a biblical view of justice, what that looks like not only in the Hebrew scriptures but also in the New Testament. What does that look like? So, I think there are some more practical things to say. Dr. Raschke, would you like to wrap us up? We have a few minutes left.

Carl Raschke: Yeah, well, you don't want to offer the invitation, "Do you have anything to say" because you know the answer to that. But we only have two more minutes, so I would say that the practical thing is that—of course, I'm speaking to professors—if we're going to throw around terms, let's see if we can understand the origins of the terms. I use the term genealogy which means we kind of trace the process by which something happened, but a lot of these memes, or these stereotypes that are tossed around, like all stereotypes, have some kind of basis in history or human interaction, but they take on a life of their own. They metastasize and they become used as kind of ideological clubs, they're weaponized, so to speak.

That's what happened, and of course, social media has a lot to do with that. It used to be that only people who were "authorized" to say things—I'm using that in a broad sense—usually got the voice. Now with social media, anybody can say anything. That's good or bad because it makes it more democratic and participatory; it makes it bad because essentially those kinds of easy metaphors and lazy ways of thinking kind of take hold. I would say actually read the books, and read what people say.

There's a little book out there that somebody asked me about earlier today, it's called *Critical Race Theory: A Very Short Introduction*. It's not the best book I don't think, but it'll help you understand what the debates really are. For example, the Marxist turn in critical race theory. So, there's a guy named Charles Mills; he wrote a book called *From Class to Race*. He really was the one that turned the discussions in critical race theory in that way, but he was not in this sense representative of all critical race theory. So, we know just that people of all kinds of ethnic categorizations are not all the same, including white people. All critical race theorists are not the same. Inform yourself; basically, be willing to be transformed through the experience of nuance which, that being said, should garner results.

That being said, we are out of time, and I want to let everyone know, I encourage you to come to the event on Tuesday at this particular time when we'll have the Critical Conversation with Eric Kaufman. Dr. Kaufman and his book *Whiteshift*. It's been a very influential and, of course, controversial book because he's not a theorist in that sense. He's a demographer, he's fact driven, and he has a certain perspective, and it may not seem right to some people, but I think he does a very good job of arguing what he has to say.

I know Josh, who introduced me to him in the first place, worked with him at an institute, a research institute there in Vienna. That's one of the other arguments you hear a lot is that, that this is all about American issues, and yes, the question of race is important. That was the kind of tag here, let's get real about race. Getting real means let's really dig down. Let's hear what the different positions are and let's see what kind of facts we can really dig out.

So, I encourage you all to continue this conversation. If we're talking about consumerism, get away from this kind of spectator role, whether it is going to entertain you or not. You can learn more, read books, read articles. So that will be Tuesday, the 28th, and next month, believe it or not, and you'll get announcements about that because you're on our list, we're going to be talking about another hot-button issue in the same kind of modality, and it's abortion. So, this is the first difficult discussion, and it won't be our last. Thank you all and we have you on our mailing list and we'll let you know when the video of this is available. Thank you.