

A Church Dismantled and the Truth and Relevance of Critical Race Theory

Without naming it as such, I've been teaching Critical Race Theory for thirty years, for at the heart of CRT is nothing more than documentation of the realities of racial oppression and violence that Black Americans, Native Americans, and other persons of color have experienced since the founding of this country. But if we can call it a theory--then we can begin to doubt the very facts and history that underly a so-called theory. And folks like Whoopie Goldberg can get away with saying that the Holocaust was NOT about racism and Joe Rogan can get a slap on the hand and apologize for his blatant racist language.

What many white folks fail to understand is that a theory is by definition a set of concepts or ideas that can be tested to see if they stand up to the models that we create or the experiments we run to debunk or support them. But there is no hypothesis about what people of color have experienced in this country since their forced migration to a world where blackness would become synonymous with bondage--in the plantation, during Jim Crow, as mass incarceration, and now through the rejection of Critical Race Theory. The white church largely failed during slavery to come to the aid of its black brothers and sisters, it failed during Jim Crow, it has failed during the era of mass incarceration, and it is failing once again with its crusade against CRT.

An evangelical leader and writer in this crusade is a black man and evangelical, Voddie Baucham. Baucham is being read and embraced widely by white evangelicals because Baucham is saying what so many white folks have been saying for 300 years. But Baucham is not telling the truth, and those who follow him have no idea of the risks that they are creating and the dangers they are taking the church into.

Baucham's major book in which he addresses CRT is called *Fault Lines*. He begins the book by blaming the discipline of sociology for most of society's sins and ills and then proceeds to give a short chapter to describe why this is the case.

His thesis is that Karl Marx (who never thought of himself as a sociologist but is one of the "Big Three" theorists of the discipline) is responsible for society's failures. Why? Because Baucham argues, Marx introduced the idea that society experiences conflict and that conflict is based upon inequality, and inequality is the result of differences in power between groups. To Baucham's credit, this short summary of Marx is correct. But Baucham only needed to look at the Old Testament prophets and the teaching of Jesus to see that Marx was correct.

Since the Garden of Eden, humankind has been in conflict as the result of inequality and inequity grounded in differences between those who have and those who do not. The people of Israel were taken into exile for their failure to address this pattern through the implementation of the Year of Jubilee. But the Year of Jubilee--redistribution of property and freeing of slaves smacks of socialism I suspect. And so just as God's people then could ignore God's incessant call for Shalom based on God's order and justice, it should not surprise us that we as God's people today can do the same thing.

After debunking Marx (whose view of what a society should look like was based on his understanding of the early church in Acts 2 and 4), Baucham then debunks the development of critical theory in Germany in the 1930s and 40s--a theory that combined

the writings of Marx with those of German sociologist Max Weber's thesis of modernity's iron cage. He argues that the critical theorist's wrongdoing was that they addressed "structural changes causing inequity" and that "they worked from the perspective that society was broken and that they needed to identify the people and institutions that could make changes and provide practical goals for the transformation of society." Bauchman then concludes that critical theorists are guilty of identifying the problems of a society in order to bring about a social revolution. We might argue that this was the precise calling of both the Old Testament prophets and of our Lord!

But perhaps the greater problem with Bauchman is that he fails to mention that critical theory arose in the midst of the rise of authoritarian regimes throughout Europe and in fact, was an effort to combat the rising anti-Semitic tide in Germany that would destroy the lives of 6 million Jews and many with disabilities, those who identified with what we now term LGBTQ+, and more. In fact, the critical theorists fled Germany because of Hitler's threat to their lives.

What Bauchman also fails to mention is that it was the race science of eugenics, developed in the United States in the early 20th century by the white scientific establishment, that became the ideology, rationale, and justification for Hitler's extermination of the Jews and others. Because race science taught us that Black folks were less than human. And when we dehumanize and objectify individuals, it's not quite so hard to understand why white southerners could go to church in the morning and take a picnic lunch to a lynching in the afternoon.

Fortunately, Bonhoeffer and a few others saw through the demonic schemes of the principalities and powers, and for the joy set before him abandoned his life for the sake of confronting those powers. The question for today's church is will we do the same or will we deny that the same serpent who entered the Garden of all Goodness is being invited to blind us to heavenly realities today and the principalities and powers that war there.

And if A Church Dismantled doesn't awaken to these realities we will also miss the joy that awaits us! For the goal of this project above everything else is to reveal that One upon whom the Spirit came in order to **"preach good news to the poor...bind up the brokenhearted, proclaim liberty to the captives, freedom to the prisoners...to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of the Lord..." (Isaiah 61).**