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Book Review: Fault Lines: The Social Justice Movement and Evangelicalism's Looming Catastrophe

Tyler R. Tennes

Liberty University, John W. Rawlings School of Divinity

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic and the death of George Floyd became the catalyst of political and social unrest in 2020, fueling social justice movements in many areas. Central to the unrest is what *Time Magazine* called “America’s Overdue Racial Awakening,” which highlighted the fallout of George Floyd’s death and the ensuing strife.¹ The Church was not exempt from the unrest and public dialogue on social justice, with several pastors and members looking for leadership on these issues. This national social justice conversation is driving domestic policy decisions with purposed legislation such as H.R. 5 “The Equality Act” and police reform bills such as the “George Floyd Justice in Policing Act of 2020,” and many Christians are unsure of how to respond.² Dr. Baucham addresses a Christian response in *Fault Lines: The Social Justice Movement and Evangelicalism’s Looming Catastrophe* from the perspective of a pastor, church planter, former social worker, and the current dean of the School of Divinity at African Christian University. With Critical Theory becoming a common reference in the public discussion, Dr. Baucham outlines how the current issues surrounding social justice are not as simple as they appear. Throughout *Fault Lines*, the author explains how Critical Theory and its subsets, Critical Race Theory-Intersectionality and Critical Social Justice are grounded in Marxism, the public social justice conversation is perpetuating misinformation, and is incompatible with Christianity as a competing worldview.³

Discussion

In 1848, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels opened the *Communist Manifesto* by stating, “A specter is haunting Europe—the specter of Communism.”⁴ In 2021, Dr. Baucham has identified the specter is still haunting, but now in the form of Critical Theory. Dr. Baucham begins his discussion with a section titled “Thought Line,” summarizing how Critical Theory is founded in Marxist ideology.

Marxist Roots

Critical Theory and its subsets, Critical Race Theory-Intersectionality (CRT-I) and Critical Social Justice (CSJ), can be traced through the Frankfurt School and Antonio Gramsci back to Marx’s Conflict Theory.⁵ At its core, a Marxist worldview simplifies the world into systems of oppression and focuses on restructuring power. While restructuring power is not always bad and sometimes necessary, the term “critical” in the social sciences is “geared toward identifying and

¹ Edward Felsenthal, ed., “Nation BLM: America’s Overdue Racial Awakening,” *Time Magazine*, 2020, 38-49.

² David Cray, “LGBTQ rights bill ignites debate over religious liberty,” *Associated Press*, March 8, 2021 March 8, 2021. <https://apnews.com/article/joe-biden-race-and-ethnicity-baptist-united-states-southern-baptist-convention-7835e3ff55e04c8634ab92541bdc12b3>; Joanna Lampe, *Comparing Police Reform Bills: the Justice in Policing Act and the JUSTICE Act* (Washington: Congressional Research Service, 2020), 1.

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

⁴ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (Minneapolis: Learner Publishing Group, 2017), 1.

⁵ Baucham, *Fault Lines*, xii-xiii.

exposing problems in order to facilitate revolutionary political change.”⁶ While brief, this section provides context for the reader that has not been introduced to Critical Theory. Additionally, understanding CRT-I and CSJ terminology is vital, as they use familiar words with distorted definitions.⁷ In what Dr. Baucham refers to as a “new canon,”⁸ he explains how words such as “racist” and “systemic racism” sound similar but have different meanings leading people to talk past each other.

When most hear the term racist, they think of the traditional definition: “A belief that one’s own racial or ethnic group is superior, or that other such groups represent a threat to one’s cultural identity, racial integrity, or economic well-being.”⁹ However, when advocates of CSJ use the term “systemic racism,” they are referring to a system of racism, for example:

CRT recognizes that racism is engrained in the fabric and system of the American society. The individual racist need not exist to note that institutional racism is pervasive in the dominant culture. This is the analytical lens that CRT uses in examining existing power structures.¹⁰

Interestingly, this is how a person may be termed a racist without holding the traditional belief that one’s “racial or ethnic group is superior,” they simply need to support the assumed oppressive “system.” Dr. Baucham rightly asserts that Christians should be concerned with justice in society but challenges the notion that if an individual is not for “social justice,” they are “anti-social justice.”¹¹ This dichotomy arises from the Marxist roots of CSJ, and the author encourages readers to seek justice through biblical principles.

False Narrative

Dr. Baucham provides a review of the misinformation surrounding law enforcement in the U.S. in chapter three. Central to his point is “correlation does not equal causation,”¹² or just because there is a disparity when statistics are filtered by race does not mean racism is the cause. There could be any number of causes, but central to the CRT-I worldview is the assumption of an underlying system of racist oppression; therefore, all disparities become evidence of the oppressive system.¹³ However, Dr. Baucham finds little evidence of racial disparities in police shootings upon review of the criminal justice literature stating, “[t]he idea that America has a race-based police brutality problem is simply not true.”¹⁴

The author also reviews many of the incidents that have become a part of the “say their names” campaign, which aims to bring attention to Black Americans that have died during

⁶ Helen Pluckrose and James Lindsay, *Cynical Theories: How Activist Scholarship Made Everything about Race, Gender, and Identity—and Why This Harms Everybody* (Durham: Pitchstone Publishing, 2020), 114.

⁷ Baucham, *Fault Lines*, 67.

⁸ Ibid. See chapter 4, “A New Religion” for a review of Critical Race Theory-Intersectionality literature. Dr. Baucham reviews scholarship by Ibram X. Kendi, Robin DiAngelo, and Peggy McIntosh.

⁹ Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “Racist.”

¹⁰ “What is Critical Race Theory?,” UCLA School of Public Affairs, accessed May 13, 2021, <https://spacs.wordpress.com/what-is-critical-race-theory/>.

¹¹ Baucham, *Fault Lines*, 5.

¹² Ibid, 48.

¹³ Pluckrose and Lindsay, *Cynical Theories*, 133.

¹⁴ Baucham, *Fault Lines*, 13.

interactions with law enforcement and challenges the misinformation surrounding genuine tragedies. For example, nearly seven years after the incident, many still believe that Michael Brown was shot execution-style with his hands in the air. Though official investigations and eyewitness testimony show the “hands up, don’t shoot” account is based in false testimony.¹⁵ In other cases, Dr. Baucham reviews how incidents such as Tamir Rice, George Floyd, and Philando Castile are not unique to Black Americans; but there have been similar incidents involving White Americans that have not made national headlines.¹⁶ For example, Tony Timpa, a person with schizophrenia was killed by Dallas Police in 2016 after calling the police on himself because he was off his medication and needed help. Video footage shows Mr. Timpa pleading for help over 30 times as the officers laughed and made jokes holding him to the ground in a similar position as Mr. Floyd four years later. After being held down for 14 minutes, the paramedics found him lifeless and were unable to resuscitate him.¹⁷ Understanding the facts surrounding these incidents is crucial, as these incidents are driving the CSJ narrative in national police reform legislation, and as Dr. Baucham observes:

Today, people are rioting and demanding justice before knowing the facts, and in most cases, without ever considering the aforementioned [Christian] principles. And here is the key: *People are ignoring these principles because the standard of justice upon which their pleas are built does not come from the God of Scriptures.*¹⁸

These topics will engage the reader and are likely to challenge many assumptions people hold, yet CSJ is about more than race and law enforcement, as Dr. Baucham reviews in the latter third of *Fault Lines*.

Critical Theories Incompatibility with Christianity

Christians are called to stand for justice and speak out against the sin of racism. However, Christians do not need CSJ to speak out against racism, as they have a better answer. Sin arises out of a heart problem, and for 2,000 years the Gospel of Jesus Christ has provided answers to sinful heart problems.¹⁹ Dr. Baucham is careful not to condemn reading on a broad range of topics, but notes how many have begun to adopt ideas undermining the sufficiency of scripture.²⁰ This subversion is inadvertently creating a system of “works” to achieve forgiveness, as the author notes:

[P]eople are not called to God for forgiveness. They are not told that Christ’s blood is sufficient. No, they are told that they must do the unending work of antiracism. And this

¹⁵ Baucham, *Fault Lines*, 59.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 55-57.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 54.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 44-45. The principles mentioned are to: “not bear false witness,” “a single witness shall not suffice,” “you shall not do injustice in court,” and “does our law not judge a man without giving him a hearing” (Exod. 20:60; Deut. 19:15; Matt. 18:16; Lev. 19:15, John 7:51, ESV).

¹⁹ Baucham, *Fault Lines*, 210.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 118-119.

work must be done regardless of their own actions since the issue at hand is a matter of communal, generation guilt based on ethnicity.²¹

In chapter seven, “The Ground is Moving,” the author observes that church leaders are afraid to take a stand because CSJ is a “political lightning rod.”²² Yet, congregations are looking for leadership on how to respond to the changes in culture. Dr. Baucham admonishes the often “hostile” and “chilling” internal conflict within the evangelical church, focusing on the 2019 Southern Baptist Convention resolution on CRT-I as well as the lack of agreement on the “Dallas Statement on the Gospel and Social Justice.”²³ Leadership and direction are essential, as Marxist ideology often hijacks the goodwill of individuals, and they become unwitting accomplices in the movement.²⁴ An example of this is the dichotomy previously noted where individuals not wanting to be labeled “anti-social justice” may feel pressure or enthusiasm to advocate for CSJ. Dr. Baucham notes, “much of what we are seeing today is disagreement between well-meaning brothers and sisters,”²⁵ but warns that evangelical churches who adopt CSJ will soon be pressured to take unbiblical stances on family, marriage, sexual morality, gender, and abortion because it is a comprehensive worldview.²⁶ Understanding CSJ is key for Christians navigating legislation such as H.R. 5, “The Equality Act,” and more recently state legislation regarding CRT-I in schools.²⁷ The most worrisome of all these issues is CSJ teaches that “Christian Privilege” is a part of the oppressive hegemony.²⁸ A leading educational textbook reviewed by Dr. Baucham claims the “historical and contemporary manifestations of religious oppression” play “out in the U.S. through [a] pervasive Christian hegemony.”²⁹ Churches that have adopted CSJ have let a wolf “in the gates and [the wolf] seeks to use genuine love as leverage” to achieve its goals.³⁰ Dr. Baucham’s answer to CSJ is clear. He calls Christians to avoid the extra-biblical CSJ movement and cling to the gospel:

I have heard a mantra lately that rings hollow in my ears: “There can be no reconciliation without justice.” When I hear that I want to scream, “YES! AND THE DEATH OF CHRIST IS THAT JUSTICE!” All other justice is proximate and insufficient.³¹

²¹ Ibid., 129. Dr. Baucham makes a note here about *Be the Bridge* and references to generational guilt and concerns with this as a reference within the Church.

²² Baucham, *Fault Lines*, 138.

²³ Ibid., 136-141.

²⁴ Paul Kengor, *The Devil and Karl Marx: Communism’s Long March of Death, Deception, and Infiltration* (Gastonia: TAN Books, 2020), 102.

²⁵ Baucham, *Fault Lines*, 137.

²⁶ Baucham, *Fault Lines*, 218-220.

²⁷ Caroline Downey, “Idaho Passes Law Banning Critical Race Theory ‘Indoctrination’ at Public Schools,” *National Review*, April 29, 2021.

²⁸ Baucham, *Fault Lines*, 207; Kengor, *The Devil and Karl Marx*, 113. See Chapter 7 “Liquidating Religious Beliefs” for how Marxist movements have historically attacked the church.

²⁹ Maurianne Adams and Khyati Joshi, “Religious Oppression,” in *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice*, ed. Lee Anne Bell (New York: Routledge, 2016), 280-281.

³⁰ Baucham, *Fault Lines*, 231.

³¹ Ibid., 229.

Conclusion

Critical Theory and its subsets, CRT-I and CSJ are incompatible with biblical Christianity, and Dr. Baucham concludes *Fault Lines* with an appeal to the gospel. The appeal is relevant for all Christians, and *Fault Lines* will aid current church leaders, lay leaders, members, and seminary students as they navigate these issues within society. It provides a brief review of Critical Theories origins and how this worldview is incompatible with an evangelical worldview. Nevertheless, Critical Theory has entered evangelical churches and the public dialogue driving the discussion on several domestic policies. Many Christians are at a loss of how to respond, and others have unknowingly been swept into embracing a competing worldview. *Fault Lines* is sure to stir emotions no matter what side of these issues the reader finds themselves. Dr. Baucham does not seek to condemn those advocating CSJ but attempts to reach across the fault line to provide Christians a resource to navigate social justice conversations while clinging to the Gospel of Christ.

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