

A Written Dialogue on the Subject of Racism, and Christian Racial Reconciliation

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Dear Readers,

The contents within this document is an exchange initiated by Scott Allen, president of the Disciple Nations Alliance (DNA) in hopes of dialoguing with Dennae Pierre, executive director of Surge on the topic of Christian racial reconciliation in light of the events following George Floyd incident in Minneapolis with the goal of better understanding each other's perspectives and exploring common ground.

Both DNA and Surge have been connected to the global church yet rooted in Phoenix - DNA having a more global focus, Surge being strategically focused on Arizona.

DNA exists to help the church rise to her full potential as God's principal agent in restoring, healing and blessing broken nations. Surge exists to display Jesus in Arizona by equipping, reconciling, and activating God's people for mission. We believe each other shares common desires to see the church remain anchored in the gospel while also engaging culture. Surge seeks to be a distinct witness to the kingdom of God in the world and DNA seeks to have a distinctively Biblical redemptive impact on society and culture.

For many years now our ministries have intersected with each other, and we have participated in collaborative projects or events. As peers in various spaces, we have respect for one another and the fruit of the Spirit is evident in the staff of both organizations.

In the past few years however we have had growing disagreement about how the church might engage with topics around race and racism. That said, we have maintained a spirit of friendship, resulting in a willingness to devote time this summer to have a written dialogue with each on this important and timely topic. In such a divisive and polarized time, our hope was to model a dialogue that displayed civility, respect, intellectual hospitality, and grace in how we approached our disagreements.

I (Scott) initiated this dialogue in response to an email that Surge sent to its mailing list on June 13 titled "A note and prayer from Dennae and Kimberly as the church speaks out about racism." That email announced the formation of a new initiative called ["Arizona Churches Stand Together for Black Lives."](#)

Ever since its founding in 2013, I've been concerned about the Black Lives Matter organization. My concern has only grown as I've learned more about the openly Marxist commitments of its founders, and its massive financial backing from people like George Soros and his Open Society Foundation. It was around this time that a new lexicon began to go mainstream: People began using phrases like white privilege, white fragility, and systemic/structural racism. Definitions also began changing. Words like justice, racism, and equality began to take on new meanings. Even Martin Luther King Junior's famous dream was seemingly being discredited. Where he dreamed of a nation in which people were judged by the content of their character, and not the color of their skin, suddenly skin-color was all-important, and personal character seemingly counted for very little.

As a result of these cultural shifts, the evangelical church began to divide. Many evangelical leaders openly supported Black Lives Matter, and employed the new lexicon and redefinitions freely. Others, like me, grew increasingly concerned, even alarmed, by these changes. So when I learned about the new initiative that Surge was organizing, I was hopeful. Perhaps this would be an opportunity for evangelical leaders in Phoenix with differing views to come together, listen and learn from both sides, and explore common ground, working together to improve race relations. But as I read [the document introducing the new initiative](#), the language that was being used, and the resources being recommended, it seemed that only one viewpoint was being represented. So I reached out to Dennaë to explore whether we might discuss our differences in an open, civil way that would maintain the bond of Christian friendship. She graciously agreed.

I (Dennaë) agreed to participate because I want the church to be awakened, healed, reformed, and renewed by the gospel. I want God's people to receive the benefits of lament and confession of both communal *and* individual sin. I want them to then go with joy into the most painful parts of our communities and display the kingdom of God as they repair what generations of sin erode. Not to simply try to rid the world of brokenness, but to point our pain-filled world to the future restoration of all things and invite them to join God's mission and display that kingdom now, on earth, as it is in heaven. I want the wealthy and the poor, the powerful and the oppressed, to see Christ's healing restorative light break into darkness and reconcile us to one another. I want the prideful to delight in being humbled and the humble to delight in being exalted. I want us to pour out our privileges for the weakest among us. The gospel initiates, produces, and sustains this fruit.

I believe Scott says he shares many of these desires, but is ignoring evangelicalism's participation in racial injustice and minimizing our role in systemic sin, and by doing so, he is unwittingly creating barriers to our world clearly seeing and hearing the gospel. Scott attributes the cultural shifts to be what is causing division in the church even though Black evangelicals have been describing the division the entire 20 years since we started multi-ethnic ministry, hundreds of years prior to that and presently from stories of longstanding communal pain. I attribute the division to pride that is blinding the church of her idolatry and a lack of repentance for past and present sin. Evangelicals struggle to read their opponents charitably and not know how to apply common grace to ideas outside the Christian faith.

Scott's assessment of the events lack an articulation of the complex and longstanding pain that has led to our generation's racial justice movement. While Scott is gracious to approach me and polite in his communication, there is increasing militancy from many who share his convictions (as well as those who share mine). I'm concerned we aren't using the basic habits of peacemaking, let alone reconciliation, and if Christians do not learn some new dialogue patterns we may be contributors, even initiators, of future violence in our nation.

My desire to engage in this dialogue is to attempt to get to the root of what we are truly disagreeing on. Our disagreements are not small or insignificant and I believe where they go unresolved it will continue to have serious consequences to the church scattered throughout the United States. I desire to demonstrate that the way forward is not to compromise Christian character or kindness even while uncovering significant differences. In this specific way, I believe Scott and his followers can choose to be partners in modeling brotherly kindness to a church that demonstrates greater and greater hostility to one another. Lastly it should be noted that I asked an Anglican pastor in downtown Phoenix, Andrew Straviz, to join me in writing the first two of the three letters.

Brothers and sisters, we recognize the confines of word limits and 6 brief exchanges is hardly enough to get into depth around the diversity of important questions raised in these letters. We hope those who take the time to read take seriously the gravity of the times we are in and discern the response of faithful discipleship and missionary encounter in the midst of it. We both feel honored to serve the pastors and churches connected to each of our ministries and leave our exchange committed to more fervent prayer along the lines of Paul's beautiful prayer for one another and God's people in our city:

"I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe..." Ephesians 1:17 - 19

May Christ's peace rule God's children,

Scott Allen
President, DNA

Dennae Pierre
Executive Director, Surge Network

Initial Post from Scott, June 19, 2020

Dear Andrew and Dennaë,

Thank you so much for this opportunity to engage with you both in a Christian dialogue on issues of racial injustice. This discussion is being prompted by the emails sent out by Dennaë and the Surge Network on June 13 and 17 announcing the formation of a new initiative called “Arizona Churches Stand Together for Black Lives.” As you wrote, your goal for this network is to take steps towards “peacemaking, racial reconciliation, and repair among our Black and Brown communities.”

I deeply appreciate your heart for racial reconciliation and peacemaking, and praise God for the leadership and hard work you are putting into this effort.

I share your heart. The Disciple Nations Alliance, where I serve as president, is a biblical worldview discipleship ministry that focuses on the power of biblical truth to transform broken, impoverished communities. Biblical teaching on ethnic unity and reconciliation are central to our training. I’ve personally been involved in racial reconciliation efforts in both Rwanda following the 1994 genocide, and in South Sudan in the years following its separation from the north

As you well-know, the Bible has incredibly powerful teaching that leads to racial equality and unity and undercuts racism.

- There is only one race--the human race--with Adam and Eve as our common ancestor.
- All people, regardless of their ethnicity or skin color, are made in God’s image, with God-given dignity, worth, and rights to life and liberty.
- All people, regardless of ethnicity or skin-color are fallen rebels. In the words of Alexander Solzhenitsyn, the line between good and evil doesn’t run between racial groups, or males and females, or classes, or political parties, or any other group. It runs “through every human heart.”
- We all are in need of grace and forgiveness, which God extends to all of us—equally—no matter our class, sex, ethnicity, or skin color.
- “For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for *you are all one in Christ Jesus*” (Galatians 3:27-28, italics added).

Where these incredible powerful truths take root in a culture, transformation happens, slavery is abolished, racism is undercut, and racial reconciliation is possible.

I have no doubt that both of you share my passion for these powerful truths.

I should also say that I’m a big supporter of the Surge Network, and have been greatly blessed by many of its leaders, in particular Tyler Johnson, Josh Prather, Michael Goheen, and Chris Gonzales. We share a passion for the local church, and a wholistic approach to ministry that encompasses gospel proclamation and social and cultural transformation.

Turning now to the issue of racism in America today, I’ve observed fairly substantial changes in the broader culture on this issue going back to at least 2012 and the shooting of Trayvon Martin in Florida, the rise of the Black Lives Matter organization and movement around 2013, and the race riots in

Ferguson, Missouri, in the wake of the fatal shooting of Michael Brown one year later. Here are a few of my observations:

- The definition of racism is now contested in a way that it wasn't 20 years ago. The same applies to words like "equality" and even "justice."
- There is a new emphasis on structural or systemic racism (and systemic injustice more broadly). The police and the criminal justice systems are regularly identified as prime examples of systemic racism.
- There is a relatively new lexicon of words and phrases that were almost unheard of twenty years ago. These include "whiteness," "white privilege," "white fragility" and of course, the colloquial expression "woke."
- The history of the United States is contested today as never before. It is increasingly common for people to portray the U.S. as a fundamentally racist nation founded and established in ways that would ensure racial inequality (the basic message of the New York Time's *1619 Project*).

In your two emails, I noted places where these themes were reflected.

- You quoted my friend Linda Morris, who said, "Racism is in the soil over every inch of our country and every seed of sin planted in it bears fruit." You then emphasized this by implying that racism is "interconnected to every system within America."
- You spoke about how "the sin and consequences of systemic racism are exposed for all to see," and in your second email, you wrote: "If you are serious about change, understand it must be structural, systemic and organizational."
- You spotlighted one resource in particular that churches should begin their journey of racial reconciliation with: *Be The Bridge: Pursuing God's Heart for Racial Reconciliation* by Latasha Morrison. As you know, Ms. Morrison has a course called "Whiteness 101" where she teaches white evangelicals to develop their white identity, acknowledge their white privilege, overcome their white fragility, and recognize white supremacy.
- You implied that all white Christians are complicit in the sin of racism. You wrote: "don't concern yourself with being 'not guilty.' Jesus loves the church too much to offer simple solutions to appease guilt...embrace feelings of guilt and shame, and be curious about it. Don't be concerned with hearing what you need to do in order to be 'not guilty.'"
- You suggested action items that people should take, including joining "peaceful demonstrations seeking to address police brutality" and encouraged Christians to prioritize voting for candidates who seek to "demilitarize the police." Yet I was puzzled that prioritizing candidates with pro-life voting records didn't make your list, given the horrific number of innocent lives (and particularly black lives) aborted in the United States each year.

Given how contested these issues are in the broader culture, I would love to dialogue with you in ways that clarify some of these. Here are some questions that I would appreciate exploring with you.

- How do you define racism?
- How do you define systemic or structural racism?

- Do you consider all white people to be complicit in racism in ways that they should feel a sense of moral guilt about?
- Latasha Morrison in her *Be The Bridge* curricula uses the words and phrases “white privilege,” “whiteness,” “whitesplaining” and “white fragility.” How do you understand these words/phrases, and their importance in furthering racial reconciliation?
- Can you clarify what you mean when you say racism covers “every inch of our soil” and is “interconnected to every system?”

Again, I deeply appreciate the opportunity to engage with you both on these important topics that we care so deeply about.

May God bless you and sustain you as you seek to do His work.

In Jesus,

Scott Allen

First Response from Andrew and Dennaë, July 9, 2020

Dear Scott,

We appreciate the invitation, thank you for extending it.. While there is much required of our leadership during this year of disruption, it's good to dialogue on these topics, especially because we have served the same Lord and city for so long. Despite disagreement and misunderstandings, particularly around the area of race and reconciliation, we hope to ultimately stir one another toward greater love of God, service to his church, and good deeds toward those most suffering in our city and nation.

We'd like to start by responding mostly to one part of your prompt, certainly not to dismiss the other questions, which we look forward to engaging with. But it might be helpful to begin with our common ground in our Christian faith and the Story from which we derive our identity, dignity, and purpose. In order to do this, we want to address the assumption that language for systemic injustice and privilege are novel in the last 20 years or so. This assumption is not shared by most non-white Christians, and certainly not shared by the legal and philosophical thinkers from whom these academic categories have come. While we are also continually learning, this lexicon is at least as old as systems theory itself, about 70 or so years, and perhaps better aged at near 130 years old in the Catholic Church's social teaching. But it is *practically* as old as the centuries of prophetic literature confronting the priests and kings in their alliance against the disinherited; as old as Psalm 72 and many other Psalms of rage and imprecation, which record the cries of the oppressed against godless cultural and political violence; as old as the stories of the Kings, and God's direct call and confrontation regarding their care of the people; and as old as the Pentateuch, which records the creation of Israel from those subjugated by Egypt. The Hebrew Bible is relentlessly political, institutional, and systems oriented, constantly witnessing to the Almighty's concern with how nations and their leaders legislate and police the people, especially the poor.

But our common ground leads us to an even more ancient time, in the Judeo-Christian origin of humanity. We understand the intent of Genesis 3-4 not merely as individual arrogance and violence, but corporate and systemic. It is a summary of the development of culture and injustice. It is no incidental point that the author tells us of the creation of cities, music and the means of production in this passage (4:17, 20-22). In other words, the Ancient Hebraic lexicon has always had these categories of corporate and systemic evil, represented in its characters, culture, and motifs: Adam (Humanity), Eve (Living), Cain (Possessor), Abel (Empty), Lamech (Low): each of these, having specific representative, corporate meaning. This is made explicit by Moses in Genesis 3:20, who told his people that Eve represented all the living.

It would therefore take some explicit text to cause us to interpret the original family in a *less than* representational and corporate way. In other words, it is clearly the hyper-individualism of our cultural moment that would make us think corporate and systemic responsibility isn't as old as Adam and Eve themselves. We would need some text to explicitly reframe these ancient Hebraic assumptions of systemic/corporate responsibility in order to make us think the language of systemic policy and policing is something novel. And the New Testament provides no such thing. In fact, the Gospel amplifies this sense of corporate, systemic, and generational responsibility by preaching the gospel of a Human who took all corporate and individual responsibility throughout all history on to Himself on our behalf. This utterly central Christian belief in the God-man taking responsibility for sins he didn't commit is also the

logic that frees us to take responsibility for the least, the last, and the lost in the world, and in our own country.

This whole conversation pushes us to recognize that laws have always been needed precisely because families turn against other families, because kinfolk will absolutely burden others to privilege their own. The cities and nations that kinfolk build inevitably institutionalize *group* self-interest as we build up our systems, just as the genealogy of Cain testifies they did in their city-building and their culture-making. And just like Cain justified his murder by individualism (“Am I my brother’s keeper?”), and obscured his guilt with self-pity (“My punishment is more than I can bear”); so have peoples and nations rationalized their abusiveness and played the victim when their injustice is confronted. This is as true of America as any other nation, and Christian theology should we be the first to acknowledge and address this reality.

So to the point, we all believe in Adam and Eve, and we all know they cannot be understood apart from their corporate meaning for all Humanity and the Living, which is why we call them *our* parents. We all believe Genesis 6, that sin is so pervasive that wicked humanity of course means wicked society, afflicted by personal indulgence and structural abuse alike. And therefore we ought to continue this interpretive frame into Genesis 3-4, recognizing that Cain represents the Possessing of others’ lives, both individually as well as corporately, and Abel represents the Emptying of innocence by this violent family of families. And what’s more, we see in Genesis 4, in the *heritage* of Cain to Lamech, the development of art, production, culture and society, and the attending valorization of Lamech’s violent injustice in song (4:23-24). In other words, Lamech’s injustice toward the weak became a barsong of pride and privilege.

My question in response to the concern about a novel lexicon is this: What did Moses mean by Genesis 3-6? I would say it is a simple enough point that we can all agree on, that alongside the development of persons to families to societies to cultures at large, alongside the heritage that institutionalizes the powerful and the powerless, the Possessor and the Empty, there was also development of the dispositional violence and injustice of Lamech. I assume we can agree that Moses wrote this history to teach Israel, the new nation, to not be like Lamech, the old empires. It would take a great amount of eisegesis to *not* interpret this as Moses’ way to remind his newly liberated people of the powers that had oppressed them; and as what they were to avoid in developing their own heritage and institutions. As we see in Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy alike, Moses called for socio-religious policies that protected the disinherited and marginalized, even to the point of *centering* them in the culmination of their annual worship (e.g. Deut 16:11-12).

And so, while we acknowledge the lexicon around systems theory and racialized policies are of the colonial and post-colonial eras, we assume all Christians agree that they highlight tragic, ancient, and universal truths that nations have been systematically cruel to the Abels of history. And we assume we agree that the Scriptures have always opposed precisely these powers and principalities that oppress the poor and poor in spirit. We can also agree that all persons are of divine dignity, and all persons are prone to marginalize others when we organize around socio-ethnic identities. This is what we love about DNA’s work across the world, especially in pursuing agrarian justice among the poor!

We believe that St Paul summarizes the Christian worldview most succinctly toward the end of his life and writings in Ephesians chapter 2, where sin is described as the pervasive influence by the prince of the power of the air to create hostility between the nations through the very laws and ordinances of

those nations. And only by the death of Christ, which tears down the wall of hostility between these “law-abiding” nations, are we all made equal, made family, in Him.

In light of all that, here are at least initial, simple responses to your other questions:

Q: How do you define racism? How do you define systemic or structural racism?

We’re satisfied with Merriam Webster’s definition. Racism is: **1**: a belief that race is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities and that racial differences produce an inherent superiority of a particular race **2 a** : a doctrine or political program based on the assumption of racism and designed to execute its principles **2 b**: a political or social system founded on racism **3**: racial prejudice or discrimination

Q: Do you consider all white people to be complicit in racism in ways that they should feel a sense of moral guilt about?

We’re not convinced that we have a shared understanding of whiteness, complicity, racism, or even how guilt operates individually and structurally, so we can’t answer this question yet. However, we rejoice that the death of Christ takes both corporate and personal guilt into himself, and gives us resurrection life to live boldly now in conflict with the powers and principalities that seek to blind us to our faults, whether intentional or complicit. We assume we can at least agree on Christ’s work for humanity, and our call as emissaries of the kingdom of God to oppose the powers and principalities.

Q: Latasha Morrison in her Be The Bridge curricula uses the words and phrases “white privilege,” “whiteness,” “whitesplaining” and “white fragility.” How do you understand these words/phrases, and their importance in furthering racial reconciliation?

Yes. For the sake of space, we’d like to refer you to Tim Keller’s article published recently called the [Sin of Racism](#). He makes the the point that whiteness was a construct (an evil one) devised to justify race-based slavery. He goes on to say, “How does systemic racism actually work? It happens through institutionalizing practices that favor white people and exclude non-white people. When people institutionalize something, they create structures that keep the practice going long after the founders of the practice leave the scene.”

While whiteness is of course not in the bible per se, it functions quite the same as the powers and principalities that God and his people contended with throughout the Biblical witness. Since our American and ecclesial structures have institutionalized whiteness intentionally and explicitly, it is important for individuals who benefit from this system to become aware of how and why. Part of reconciliation involves confessing, repenting, and resisting unjust structures. Morrison’s terms are helpful to give language to some spaces where the white, evangelical church can begin to name her 400-year history and turn toward something much more faithfully centered on Christ.

Q: Can you clarify what you mean when you say racism covers “every inch of our soil” and is “interconnected to every system?”

Racism, as a philosophical, political, economic and theological concept has been explicitly and implicitly used in the creation of America from the beginning to this day. For reference, The Color of Law by Rothenstein, and The Color of Compromise by Tisby.

Grace and peace,

Andrew Stravitz and Dennaë Pierre

First Response from Scott, July 16, 2020

Dear Andrew and Dennaë,

Thank you for the thoughtful response. I enjoyed reading it and getting a better sense of your heart.

You focused most of your response on the topic of systemic injustice. In my initial post, I suggested that all the talk of systemic racism/oppression in the broader culture was relatively new. A Google Ngram search of the terms "systemic oppression" and "systemic racism" reveals that these phrases were virtually never used in the English-speaking world until around 1970, and then used very infrequently until the mid-90s. Their use skyrocketed after 2000. This was my point. However, you are correct that the concepts are not new, and go all the way back to the Old Testament.

"What do you think accounts for their skyrocketing usage since 2000?"

You suggest that part of the reason for their increased use has to do with particular "legal and philosophical thinkers from whom these academic categories have come."

What specific people do you have in mind here?

You also talk about their source being something called "systems theory." My own examination would source these notions in a different (and perhaps related) school of thought called a *critical social theory* or simply critical theory. Are you familiar with this?

Systemic Injustice. I support your biblical exegesis of systemic injustice, which I found thoughtful and well-considered. In my own teaching on this subject, I highlight these points.

(1) We are created in God's image. God created the universe. As His image-bearers, we too create. We create culture - families, societies, cultures, institutions, etc.

(2) When Adam and Eve rebelled, they were personally impacted by the fall, but so was everything they created. Families, societies, cultures, and institutions are stained by the fall. People use power and authority for selfish ends and create systems and structures that do the same.

(3) God didn't abandon us in our fallen state. Motivated by love, He set out to redeem this fallen world. This redemptive work begins immediately after the fall and comes to its consummation in Revelation 20-21 with the final judgment of evil and the new heavens and new earth. The centerpiece of God's redemptive plan is the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

I teach that God's redemptive plan is comprehensive. He isn't merely content to redeem human souls but to restore everything impacted by the fall. So yes, systemic injustice is a reality in our world today. But so is *systemic redemption*, whereby the truth, goodness, and beauty of God's Kingdom break into this fallen world and begin to transform it.

Critical social theory, which now dominates our academic institutions, and is spilling out into the broader culture at breakneck speed, can be affirmed in its emphasis on the reality of systemic injustice and the misuse of power and authority for selfish ends.

But because it is rooted in an atheistic framework, it has no basis for redemption and consequently doesn't acknowledge or "see" point three above. Everything boils down to a zero-sum contest for power and domination between different groups. There is no basis for love, grace, mercy, or forgiveness, which

is why it bears the bitter fruit of resentment, hostility, bitterness, and grievance. It cannot lead to reconciliation, only division.

Further, it rejects the biblical doctrine of the fall--the idea that evil exists in human hearts before it manifests in social structures and institutions. Accordingly, the deepest problem with the world isn't fallen human hearts, but unjust and oppressive social structures. So at best, I would argue, that Christians should only very partially affirm its basic presuppositions, and even then, with great caution.

There are many errors that arise from focusing too narrowly on systemic injustice. If the systems are the problem, the solution that logically follows is to deconstruct and dismantle the systems and set up new ones. This revolutionary approach, which is gaining incredible momentum in the broader culture right now, always fails (often in horrific, murderous ways) because it rejects the fact that unless hearts are transformed, no amount of systemic change will lead to the better world we want.

Our deepest slavery is to sin. Our greatest oppressor is not flesh and blood, but principalities and powers. Jesus came to set the oppressed free, yes, but He was misunderstood by His followers. They longed for systemic change in the form of a political revolution against their oppressors. Jesus had something much deeper and more profound in His sights. He came to break the power of sin, and defeat the great oppressor. Once this deepest root of evil was defeated, then (and only then) could man-made systems and structures begin changing for the better as well.

For over two millennia, God has been at work redeeming this fallen world and its families, nations, systems, and structures. This transformation is never complete, fully-realized, or permanent, but it is real and significant. This Biblical, redemptive, "inside-out" process of transformation is rejected by critical social theorists who place their hope in systemic change. As Christians, we need to uphold and prioritize the power of the Gospel as the cutting edge of all positive social change.

Today, the phrase "systemic racism" has become something of a shibboleth. As Christians, I think we need to be far more cautious and discerning in our use of this phrase. It is a strong judgment. It can ruin lives and destroy families, organizations, and even nations. Before we level the charge, it seems to me that we need to have serious evidence. Justice, I would argue, demands it.

What evidence needs to be established, in your view, before this charge can truthfully be rendered?

Hyper Individualism. In your response, you spoke of "hyper-individualism" in our society. How do you see this?

Would you also agree that there is a strong (hyper?) "communitarianism" at work in our culture as well? You see this in the move to reduce people to representatives of particular communities or groups, often based on skin color (as opposed to individuals with unique backgrounds, personalities, challenges, and blessings). This, for example, is implied when people like Latasha Morrison use the phrase "white privilege." I was taught (and still believe) that it is wrong to say, "all (fill in the ethnicity or skin color) people are (fill in adjectives)." In other words, quoting the Merriam Webster definition of racism you affirmed, this is "a belief that [skin color] is the primary determinant of human traits and capacities."

Whiteness. Thank you for recommending the article by Tim Keller. I appreciated much of his biblical exposition on race and racism at the beginning of his article. However, towards the end when he began talking about whiteness and modern social theory, I began to struggle.

He wrote: "... when the African slave trade started, the idea that there was a 'white' race, as opposed to other non-white races including 'black'—*was a way to justify slavery* and give it something it never had in antiquity—a strict racial basis... No longer were you primarily Irish or German or Swedish—you were primarily white."

The contention that "whiteness" was an invention of white slaveholders to justify the slavery of black Africans seems plausible. But then Keller goes on and says "the account of the historical creation of "whiteness" in modern times *is helpful*. How is it helpful? And who "created whiteness" in modern times? He doesn't answer either question, but many attribute the creation of the concept to W.E.B. DuBois. Much can be said about DuBois, but it is worth noting that while he was a brilliant social theorist, he was also an atheist who was deeply sympathetic to Marxist theory and used it as a lens to view race relations in America.

Latasha Morrison has a lot to say about whiteness. She writes in her *Whiteness 101* curricula, "Most white people find that they have neither a healthy way to describe their whiteness nor positive emotions to attach to those descriptions." She goes on, "The task for whites is to develop a positive white identity." To do that, a white person "must become aware of his or her whiteness, accept it as personally and socially significant, and learn to feel good about it."

Connect what Keller and Morrison say about whiteness, and it seems contradictory and confusing, at least to me. Whiteness--the (evil) idea that was invented to justify the slave trade according to Keller--is something that actually defines me as a white person and I'm supposed to "accept" it as part of my identity, and "learn to feel good about" according to Morrison. She continues: It is essential that [white people] ... acknowledge the role we have played in the oppression of people of color." The obvious question in response is this: How have I (a person with white skin) oppressed POC? Her implied answer seems to be this: Because I am white, therefore I have this inherent (evil) condition called "whiteness" combined with "white privilege" which are both, by nature, oppressive to POC.

She continues: "This self-examination can (and should) be painful. It can be tempting to ... live in denial rather than face our complicity... Privilege—and its opposite, oppression—are related to white identity."

Morrison seems to adopt a good deal of her thinking on this from Robin DiAngelo's now-famous book *White Fragility*, which she quotes several times in her curriculum. DiAngelo is one of America's best-known popularizers of critical race theory, and helped pioneer the academic field called "Whiteness Studies." Like W.E.B. DuBois before her, DiAngelo is a non-Christian social theorist who seems to be significantly influenced by Marxian presuppositions applied to race, whereby "white" is the new oppressor, the new "capitalist bourgeoisie."

I'm left wondering how such confusing, derogatory, and unbiblical concepts such as whiteness and white fragility can be "helpful" for Christians to adopt in pursuing racial reconciliation. My main problem with the concept of whiteness is that it seems very difficult to distinguish between *whiteness* and *white people*. Notice, for example, how the hugely influential Ta-Nehesi Coates describes whiteness. Notice how he blurs the line between whiteness and white people:

- "Whiteness" is "an existential danger to the country and the world."
- "Whites have brought humanity to the edge of oblivion."
- "The power of domination and exclusion is central to the belief in being white, and without it, 'white people' would cease to exist for want of reasons."

These are not fringe beliefs. Coates is a widely admired, mainstream spokesperson on these topics from his perch at *The Atlantic*. His drawing of the line between good and evil between groups based on skin color is very problematic to me--and dangerous. It seems like a way of "othering" (Tim Keller's word) and problematizing an entire group of people based on their skin color.

It seems clear to me that it can only divide--only exacerbate racial hostility. Morrison, as a Christian, doesn't go as far as the atheist Coates, but she seems to be drinking water from the same well. My point is that this set of ideas goes in the opposite direction of reconciliation, which is what we both long for.

You wrote: "our American and ecclesial structures have institutionalized whiteness intentionally and explicitly." *How do you see this "institutionalizing of whiteness" today in the church in Phoenix, for example?*

Racism in America's creation. You wrote: "Racism, as a philosophical, political, economic and theological concept has been explicitly and implicitly used in the creation of America."

I don't think I'm alone in considering the cornerstone of our creation (that is, our founding as the United States) to be the Declaration of Independence, which laid the ideological foundation for our constitution. I also don't think I'm alone in considering the most important sentence in the Declaration to be this: *"We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, and are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness."*

Perhaps you disagree with me about the Declaration and the centrality of this sentence to our creation, but I fail to see how "racism, as a concept was used in the creation of America," for this certainly, is not a racist statement. It is just the opposite. The fact that we've struggled with racism, and only imperfectly live up to this principle doesn't negate the principle or make our founding explicitly racist. I would argue that the anti-racist nature of this principle provided the driving force behind the abolitionist movement and eradication of slavery, as well as the end of Jim Crow segregation. It was King's "promissory note" that had yet to fully apply to black people, and he was right. It has been a force for great good, not only in America but around the world.

Again, I strongly affirm our common desire to racial reconciliation as followers of Christ and appreciate this dialogue to sharpen one another on the best ways to accomplish this desired end.

Warmly in Christ,

Scott

Second Response from Andrew and Dennaë, August 4, 2020

Dear Scott,

We remain encouraged that you have initiated a dialogue with us as fellow Christians even in the midst of significant tension. We respect you for this and appreciate the space you have created to hear our tone as brotherly love. We hope your readers also hear our deep affection for all the saints, both in our agreements and in our disagreements. Of course, there may be times we read too much into your views, and if so, we apologize in advance for where we misunderstand your intent.

Why an increase of sociological language and the reformation of American consciences?

The increase of sociological language is the result of a combination of factors, and we will list three: the witness of the marginalized church, the televising and recording of police brutality, and the social and educational need to answer why brutality keeps happening.

First and most important, the courageous and peaceful witness by people of color against White Supremacy, especially the Black church's witness, has never allowed America to sidestep our horrific racializing sins. Their drumbeat has been loud and steady, and that prophetic truth has been eroding the Reconstructionist mythology of America. This point cannot be overstated: Black folk of all stripes, Christians, scholars, historians, etc, since the very beginning of Reconstruction, bore witness to the rapid and ubiquitous way Northern and Southern society organized against Black families, churches, businesses, and towns. This Reconstruction revisionism is still prevalent in childhood curriculums today. America divested and terrorized the Black community, and we did it through "law and order." Black Americans have never let us forget this, and since it was plain-as-day in the annals of American doctrine, there is no scrubbing this history.

Second, cameras really got rolling in the 50s, and the "law and order" violence done to Black citizens and peaceful protesters over the next 20 years was broadcast into every home. Imagine the millions of non-racist, good white parents, who all of a sudden couldn't tell their children, "well, if those negroes would just stop committing crimes and vandalizing our property and having families, they wouldn't have our hoses, dogs, and cops turned on them." Just like the printing press, the near instant publication of events via television confronted our segregated consciences. This same stemming of the tide is of course occurring today, as all the world watches American peace officers kneel calmly and emotionlessly on the necks of the marginalized. When anyone watches these videos, the notion that our "law and order" is *just* erodes more and more, and an outraged curiosity is emerging and asking, "How is this possible? What shaped that peace officer's deformed conscience? What shaped him to have no sense of his brutality, even a sense of duty and honor in his terroristic law-keeping?" It certainly was not an atheistic churning of history, or communitarianism.

Third, as Whites have begun to listen to the suppressed voice of Black and minoritized witnesses and have seen the brutality with their own eyes on a weekly basis, we are forced to ask why this happens. The only two *institutional* groups that have been carefully recording and analyzing why America is so unjust toward minorities have been communities of color and social scientists. So yes, critical theories have been incalculably important for the re-education of America and have provided the only institutional voice outside the Black community making racialized injustice plainly evident and calling for reprisal. While we would disagree with aspects of various sociological work, we view the discipline as a

whole as a partner in the call for sweeping reforms. These are the main reasons, we think, your google search shows an increase in the language of systems and critical theories.

Critical Theories, Whiteness, and American History: shibboleth, or sibboleth?

You have often agreed that the Scriptures present a systemic and corporate sense of sin/injustice and also that critical theories expose cultural power structures. But then you take issue with the supposed atheism and anthropology of critical theory, which you describe as “focusing too narrowly on systemic injustice.” You continue with the claim that the only “cutting edge” redress is the Gospel, and finish with a concern about the livelihood of those who are accused of systemic racism. Throughout your response, it’s not that you are merely agreeing, with a few caveats. You seem to agree and then levy both contradictory as well as vague rebuttals of what we thought you’d already agreed with. In other words, who is your people? Who are you? Is it shibboleth or sibboleth?

Regarding your charge of atheism, we are now confused on what you believe. In multiple places you’ve agreed that Scripture acknowledges systemic and racialized injustice, but then you call it atheistic with “no basis for redemption” when it is applied to the White Supremacy of America. Your view, in our opinion, seems like a contradiction within a Christian worldview, and a misconstrual of the Academic practice of critiquing power structures.

In regards to a Christian worldview, you have agreed multiple times that Scripture presents systemic views of sin and justice. Additionally, in a Christian worldview, we have an ethic that exposes and confesses sin. Since critical theories specifically aim to expose the power structures embedded in human hearts and societies, then it is a tutor for the confession of personal and societal sin. Therefore, critical theories are a form of common grace, calling for confession and reprisal. In regards to the academic theory and practice of critical studies, the accusation of “atheism” is not germane. Social theories intentionally expose and describe, and they often scrutinize the way cultural powers use their own *social theories* to reinforce power, just as they do religious frames. The scrutiny of power, and especially the use of religion and faith in maintaining structures, has no necessary presupposition in atheism, even if some critical theorists are in fact atheists. We assume we do not need to provide a list of Christian-led atrocities to prove that “Christian worldviews” often do not seem to prevent systemic oppression. In other words, atheism is as relevant to our reception of critical theories as it is to our reception of a doctor’s medical care or the transport of an Uber driver. To say it positively, critical theories often *sound* like aspects of the protest of Prophetic literature, because they *pronounce* corporate sin similarly. It is no surprise then that even some of the most eminent critical theorists like Horkheimer have assessed that no other system has provided the sort of ethic of love that Christianity has, thus demonstrating a commonality between critical theories and Christian ethics.

All this adds up to demonstrate no genuine engagement with any particular critical theories or theorists, nor with the array of wildly diverse writers who espouse social criticism of American and Evangelical history. Because of this, your charges of atheism and differing anthropology are not so much incorrect as they are simply a sweeping generalization, a religious bypassing of generations of testimony and scholarship that have begun to reshape American consciences. Of course, there are legitimate criticisms to be made, but we do not hear you making them. This is also true of your comments regarding non-Christians like Du Bois, DiAngelo, and Coates, and also true of your engagement with Christians like Keller and Morrison.

DuBois, for example, made for a terrible Socialist and Communist, as demonstrated by his and their mutual disdain of each other in his own lifetime. What’s more, Du Bois’ entire intellectual and political

work was in an era of unashamed and unremitting White Supremacy. This is why DuBois founded the NAACP, as a political alternative to Socialism, Communism, and Booker T. Washington's accommodation to White Supremacy. To say Du Bois was "sympathetic to Marxist theory" is *contextually the same* as saying Du Bois realized American capitalism and White Supremacy were one and the same monster still legally oppressing Blacks. And Du Bois' atheism is famously tied to the same social criticism he made of American churches, namely, blind allegiance to American White Supremacy. Sympathy to Marxism was mere desperation, and yet he ultimately rejected it. So when Du Bois is criticized on these grounds, it sounds at best like unawareness of the history of American policy and religion, and at worst like excusing White Supremacy. Your critique of Du Bois extracts him from historical context, and functionally treats him through a revisionist lens, though of course we don't think that's your intention.

Similar problems of ahistoricism mark your engagement with the other authors as well. The problem is most demonstrable in your comment:

The contention that 'whiteness' was an invention of white slaveholders to justify the slavery of black Africans seems plausible...And who 'created whiteness' in modern times?"

Plausible? Who created Whiteness? Are you uncertain about the extant records of American White Supremacy, shot through the Mid-Atlantic Slave Trade, to the Revolution and Declaration, to the Constitution, to the Civil War, to Reconstruction and Jim Crow, to redlining, mass criminalization, and over-policing? Our country's most vulnerable populations have always been crying out for reform and justice, but the only political game in town was capitalism led by almost entirely good, White Christians. Unless you're espousing paleo-confederacy, these comments reflect a lack of knowledge regarding our plain-as-day history. We cannot even begin to discuss the sociological terms embraced by people as diverse as Coates and Keller, until we have a shared view of the historical record of Evangelicalism's lock-step partnership with White Supremacy. So again, we're forced to ask, who are you? Who is your people? How do you pronounce it? Shibboleth, or sibboleth?

Next, we strongly disagree that "hyper-communitarianism" is even remotely a significant problem in America, and this also connects to the proper historical interpretation of our Declaration and Constitution. At the very most, a communal or collectivist ethic is burgeoning as a desperate reaction against the dehumanizing aspects of individualism and capitalism. Neither communism, nor Marxism, nor social critical theories have lifted a pinky finger to accomplish slavery, Jim Crow, Segregation, lynchings, massacres, etc. Only American Liberalism has done that, because only American Liberalism has ever held true power in America, largely under "Christian" leadership. One of the glorious aspects of our nation's heritage is the experiment of enshrining inalienable rights to our citizens, rights that our government cannot infringe. But our Founding Fathers near unanimously restricted these human rights from Blacks and Natives, because they believed them to be sub-human. This was encoded in both pre and post Revolution policies, as well as in the Constitution itself. It is a baffling and blasphemous contradiction that cannot be whitewashed as if they were just "men of their times." The testimony of the Black community has always condemned the slavery that our federal government and our Founding Fathers personally practiced. Scholars have argued that individualism is exactly the result of the moral hypocrisy of American doctrine that fought and bled for inalienable human rights, but then alienated those rights from People of Color.

Because of these apparent contradictions and mischaracterizations, we find your use of "shibboleth" to be ironic. In a discussion about how Christians ought to advocate for the oppressed and suffering, you invoked an ancient, ethno-linguistic marker in a way that makes White folks seem like victims of

“systemic injustice.” This is especially concerning because the charge of systemic racism is to bring attention to the horrors perpetrated upon actual oppressed peoples, most often at the hands of White Christians. In response, you are essentially saying, “But naming this sin is going to hurt feelings and reputations.” It would be quite the same, if in response to the shepherd pursuing the one lost sheep, the other 99 begrudged him, “What about us?” That was, in fact, quite the point of Jesus’ parables, to prick the consciences of the cultural First begrudging his love of the minoritized Last, and the ethnocentric Early Workers begrudging the Master’s economic generosity to the Late Comers. Nevertheless, Christian People of Color do not want white folks’ lives to be ruined by acknowledging our national sins. Instead, the great hope and joy for countless Christian leaders in this season is that repentance leads to reconciliation and restoration, and the Black community is still offering us this reconciliation.

A gospel worldview against American White Supremacy and for reform

While we are more than glad to acknowledge our mutual love of Christ crucified and resurrected for the redemption of souls, societies, and all creation, we would hope you take seriously that the arguments presented in your last two letters seem to blame shift the sins of our nation. Blame shifting is a genuine threat to the sanctification of White Evangelicals, who continue to live in spaces and cultures *historically and explicitly* designed for segregation, protection of White ownership, and criminalization of minority citizens and asylum seekers. This is especially urgent, as we are in an unprecedented season where White Evangelicals long to be advocates and are exploring their own embeddedness in the heritage of White Supremacy. Ideas have consequences, and we are concerned the consequences of your project will harm the movement for justice.

It’s the gospel that allows us to value aspects of critical theory even as it allows us to value aspects of Classical Liberalism. And it’s the kingdom of God that calls us to make substantive critiques of all ideologies, including Marxism and Liberalism. But since it is unequivocally Liberalism that has shaped American culture, policy, and injustice, we view it as the frontlines of the fight for justice for people of color. Consequently, we view most Evangelical criticism of critical theory and BLM as the same Fundamentalism of a century ago. And not coincidentally, that Fundamentalism rose up in the same way, claiming to have Christian convictions while also silencing the call for equality for People of Color. Carl Henry, Mark Noll, and Ron Sider have made this point forcefully in their own ways. But it is our current generation of scholars, who are knocking us free from our contemporary amnesia, and reminding us what has always been the case: American Fundamentalism is the main force that has perpetuated segregation to this day, and it is the same force currently trying to silence the cries for reform. We pray daily that this Fundamentalism fails, and the gospel prevails.

A question for White Evangelicalism

You emphasize that we have a shared desire for “racial reconciliation.” Our churches are ethnically segregated and many white pastors and Christians have little to no exposure to the Black community, much less to Black church history and Black theology. This is problematic given that the Black church has been the main chorus calling for Christian non-violence as well as massive reforms to our nation’s White Supremacy. Can you take time to explain what racial reconciliation would look like for White Evangelicals? How do you define “racial reconciliation” and what practically would you suggest pastors do to engage their congregations in this work?

Appreciatively,

Dennae and Andrew

Final response from Scott, August 19, 2020

Dear Andrew and Dennaë,

I'm impressed by the time and care you've put into your responses, and am sincerely grateful for the opportunity to clarify issues and sharpen my thinking. I share your deep passion and commitment to biblical justice, and your desire to be a voice for the voiceless and to uphold the cause of the poor and the oppressed.

While I've developed strong convictions on these topics, I have much to learn and undoubtedly have unbiblical perspectives that need correcting. For this reason, I value your friendship. I'm very aware of my shortcomings. I have logs in my eyes that need to be removed. I need your help seeing them. I also want to be the kind of person who loves others enough to help them remove the logs from their eyes as well. This is my heart.

I'd like to begin with what I believe is the most important part of your last post--your strong affirmation of critical social theory. You wrote:

- "critical theories have been *incalculably* important for the re-education of America"
- "While we would disagree with aspects of various sociological work, we view the discipline [critical social theory] as a whole as *a partner in the call for sweeping reforms.*"
- "critical theories are a form of common grace"
- There is "commonality between critical theories and Christian ethics."

In my previous post, I noted that critical social theory is rooted in atheistic philosophy. You wrote that this was "not germane" and essentially not relevant to a Christian consideration of the importance of this ideology to racial reconciliation.

I applaud your clarity here. You state unambiguously that when addressing the topic of racial reconciliation, critical social theory is an "incalculably" important asset to supplement the teachings of Scripture.

On this point, however, we are in disagreement. My own analysis has led me to conclude the opposite. I'll devote much of my response to explaining why I've come to this conclusion. In short, I view critical social theory as a destructive ideology that rends the social fabric and exacerbates racial tension. Over the past five years, I've become increasingly alarmed by its massive influence in the broader culture, and within the evangelical church in particular.

I believe that to rightly comprehend critical social theory, you have to see it as much more than a set of ideas that relate to power, race, sex, and sexual orientation. You have to see it as a *comprehensive worldview*. Many now describe it as a kind of religion. It provides answers to all the big worldview questions: What is ultimately real? What does it mean to be human? What is wrong with the world and how can it be made right? And many more. Its answers differ sharply from those provided by a biblical worldview, which isn't surprising when you consider that the source of this worldview is a European philosophical tradition known as *Idealism* and the writings of philosophers such as Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, and Rousseau. From this philosophical soil both Marxism and postmodernism emerged, with people like Antonio Gramsci, Sigmund Freud, Michel Foucault, and Jacques Derrida making contributions

along the way. It gave rise to the Frankfurt School social theorists, who first coined the phrase “critical theory.” These people, including Herbert Marcuse (the father of the sexual revolution), and Max Horkheimer, brought their ideas into American universities in the 1950s where they eventually came to dominate the social sciences and humanities, and ultimately large swaths of the culture in our own time. These ideas were picked up and developed by Derrick Bell, father of critical race theory, whose ideas inspired present-day popularizers including Richard Delgado, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Ibram X. Kendi, Robin DiAngelo, and the founders of Black Lives Matter, to name a few.

As regards Christian mission, I see critical social theory not as a *partner*, but as a *competitor*. I fully agree with Christian apologist Neil Shenvi, who wrote: *“I worry that too many people are trying to hold on to both Christianity and critical theory. That’s not going to work in the long run. Either we will abandon historic Christianity in favor of the core tenets of contemporary critical theory or we will abandon the core tenets of contemporary critical theory in favor of Christianity. Any amalgamation of the two will, in the long run, be unstable.”* In short, I view critical social theory as a “hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ” (Colossians 2:8).

In your previous post, you wrote that I “demonstrate no genuine engagement with any particular critical theories or theorists.” While I certainly make no claim to be an expert, I have tried to understand this ideology as best I can. Over the past five years, I have undertaken a fairly extensive study, reading from original sources, including the most influential popularizers like DiAngelo and Ta-Nehesi Coates. I’ve also read the books of evangelical proponents of critical race theory, including Ken Wytsma, Eric Mason, and Latasha Morrison. I’ve also read the critics of critical theory, both Christian and non-Christian, including James Lindsay, Neil Shenvi, and Thaddeus Williams. I’ve discovered that some of the clearest and most forceful critics are black academics like Shelby Steele, Glenn Loury, Thomas Sowell, and John McWhorter, and black evangelicals like Robert Woodson, Darrell Harrison, Virgil Walker, Chantal Monique Duson, Voddie Baucham, and Ryan Bomberger. I’ve learned a great deal from each of them.

What I’d like to do now is share my attempt at summarizing the basic worldview presuppositions of critical social theory, showing how they differ from biblical presuppositions. I’d like to encourage readers of this exchange to do their own research and decide if they think my summary is fair or not. Last week, Tim Keller published the most recent article in his series on race: [A Biblical Critique of Secular Justice and Critical Theory](#). I deeply appreciated his analysis of what he calls “postmodern critical theory,” which, he asserts, “draws on the teachings of Karl Marx.” It closely tracks my own thinking. I know you both respect Keller, so I’ll quote from his article extensively.

Andrew and Dennaë, as you read this summary below, please know that I’m not suggesting that you agree with or support all of these presuppositions. I’m sure you don’t. You said in your previous post that you “disagree with aspects of various sociological work, yet we view the discipline as a whole as a partner in the call for sweeping reforms.” You also said that “the kingdom of God ... calls us to make substantive critiques of all ideologies.”

This is simply my attempt to summarize the core, or “least common denominator” of critical theory and contrast it with core biblical beliefs. I’m quite certain that you’ll view this summary as overly simplistic and unhelpful. Perhaps in your final post you can explain how you feel I’ve missed the mark, and which aspects of critical social theory you find helpful, and which parts you don’t.

Ultimate Reality

Because critical theory is grounded in atheism, there is no God, no objective truth, and no transcendent morality, all that remains is power, and in particular, an endless struggle for power between various groups. This explains why critical theory, at its core, is concerned with power: Who has it, who doesn't, and how those who have it establish systems, structures, and norms to maintain it, and to dominate and subjugate those who don't. Power, in this framework, is entirely negative and zero-sum. The world is divided into an oppressor-oppressed binary, with nothing existing outside these categories.

As I said in my last post, there is a degree of truth in this analysis. The Bible agrees that in our fallen world, this is the way power typically functions. Jesus said to his disciples in Mark 10:43 "You know that those regarded as rulers of the Gentiles *lord it over them*, and their superiors *exercise authority over them*." But then He pivots, contrasting power and authority in the fallen world with power in God's Kingdom: "*But it shall not be this way among you*. Instead, whoever wants to become great [that is, whoever wants to possess power and authority] among you *must be your servant*, and whoever wants to be first must be the slave of all. For even the Son of Man [the most powerful being in the universe, the supreme authority] did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many."

Power *is not* all that exists. Everything cannot be reduced to power. God exists. He has all power and authority (Matthew 28:18), and yet He uses His power to serve those under authority because of love. Those who follow His example bring this revolutionary approach to power and authority into the fallen world, and in doing so, transform it. Power exists, but *so does truth, and so does love*. And because love exists at the foundation of reality, so does grace, mercy, and forgiveness.

These redemptive qualities are completely foreign to critical social theory. In the zero-sum world of social justice power struggle, there is no "live and let live" tolerance. No win-win, or even compromise. No place for forgiveness, or grace. No "love your enemy." No "first get the log out of your own eye" introspection. There is only grievance, condemnation, and retribution. Bigots, haters, and oppressors must be destroyed. We are seeing this happen with alarming frequency in what is now called "cancel culture," which is a bitter fruit of critical theory.

Here is Keller on this topic:

- [In postmodern critical theory] *reality is at bottom nothing but power.*"
- "Religious doctrine, together with all politics and law are always, at bottom, a way for people to get or maintain ... power over others."
- "Power structures mask themselves behind the language of rationality and truth. So academia hides its unjust structures behind talk of 'academic freedom,' and corporations behind talk of 'free enterprise,' science behind talk of 'empirical objectivity', and religion behind talk of 'divine truth'. All of these ... are really just constructed narratives designed to dominate..."

Keller highlights the futility of this cynical view of reality:

- "if all people with power ... inevitably use it for domination, then if any revolutionaries were able to replace the oppressors at the top of the society, why would they not become people that should subsequently be rebelled against and replaced themselves? What would make them different?"

Good questions.

Keller then contrasts the critical theory view of power with the biblical view. "... Rule and authority [that is, *power*] are not intrinsically wrong. Indeed, they are necessary in any society. But while not ending the [ruler/ruled] binary, neither does Christianity simply reverse it. It does not merely fill the top rungs of authority with new parties who will use power in the same oppressive way that is the way of the world... Because it is rooted in the death and resurrection of Jesus, Christianity neither eliminates nor merely reverses the ruler/ruled binary—rather, it subverts it. When Jesus saves us through his use of power only for service, he changes our attitude toward and our use of power."

Human nature and identity

James Lindsay contrasts the biblical view of human identity with that of critical theory. According to the biblical view, people "are children of God, fashioned in His divine image. [According to] Social Justice, we are children of society, fashioned by its social constructions and the power dynamics they maintain."

Postmodern critical theory views human beings as creatures whose identity is *entirely socially constructed*, and defined by group affiliations, particularly those based on race, sex, and sexual identity. There is no shared human nature. As Nancy Pearcey explains: "Everyone's ideas are merely social constructions stitched together by cultural forces. *Individuals are little more than mouthpieces for communities based on race, class, gender, ethnicity, and sexual identity.*" She goes on to say that critical theory reduces "individuals to puppets of social forces . . . powerless to rise above the communities to which they belong."

What is the casualty of this reductionist view? The individual, along with personal agency, and responsibility.

Here's Keller on this topic:

- "[Postmodern critical theory] undermines our common humanity. Biblically, we are primarily individuals before God, made in his image, and secondarily members of a race/nationality. *The postmodern view, however, makes one's racial or group identity primary.*"
- "[According to postmodern critical theory] individual rights nor individual identity are primary... [It] is an illusion to think that, as an individual, you can carve out an identity in any way different or independent of others in your race, ethnicity, gender, and so on. Group identity and rights are the only real ones."
- "[Postmodern critical theory] sees human beings as inherently good or blank slates. Any evil is instilled in us by society, by social systems and forces. So any pathology (poverty, crime, violence, abuse) is due to one thing only- wrong social policy."

Morality

Critical social theory has a defined moral system. Evil and moral guilt are associated with power, which is always oppressive, while moral innocence, and moral authority are associated with oppressed victims. At present, those with power are said to be heteronormative males with white skin. They have established and maintain hegemonic power structures to oppress and subjugate women, people of color, sexual minorities (LGBTQ+) and others. These interlocking webs of systemic oppression have many labels: white supremacy, toxic masculinity, homophobia, misogyny, the male-female binary, and the patriarchy are just a few.

What is the solution to evil/oppression? In revolutionary fashion, oppressed victims and their allies must unite to unmask, deconstruct, and overthrow these oppressive power structures, norms, systems, and institutions. We see this revolutionary fervor in our headlines every day, with courthouses on fire, violence and looting, and statues being toppled.

Keller calls the moral system established by postmodern critical theory “deeply incoherent.” Critical theorists operate within an atheistic framework, yet claim a basis for knowledge of good and evil. Keller writes: “You cannot insist that all morality is culturally constructed and relative and then claim that your moral claims are not. ... this may therefore be a fatal flaw for the entire theory.”

More Keller on this topic:

- “Guilt is not assigned on the basis of individual actions but on the basis of group membership and social/racial status.”
- “in this postmodern view of justice groups are assigned higher or lower moral value depending on their power, and some groups are denied any redeeming characteristics at all.”
- “If you are white, male, straight, cisgender then you have the highest amount of power. If you are none of these at all, you are the most marginalized and oppressed... Most importantly, each category toward the powerless end of the spectrum has a *greater moral authority*... Only powerlessness and oppression brings *moral high ground*...”

Ideologies that draw the good vs. evil line between different groups are not just wrong, they are dangerous. If this group is good, and that group is evil, it is very easy to dehumanize the “evil” group. This is what happened in Nazi Germany with the Jews and in communist nations with “capitalists.” It happened in Rwanda in 1994, when the Hutu-led government, fueled by an ideology of hate, launched a genocide that left as many as a million Tutsis dead in just one hundred days.

Followers of Jesus Christ must never be complicit in an ideology that encourages the dehumanization of our neighbors, particularly when the dehumanization is based on an immutable characteristic such as skin color.

Keller warns: “*To see whole races as more sinful and evil than other races leads to things like the Holocaust.*”

Now, contrast this to biblical morality. In the immortal words of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn: “The line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either [and we can add, nor between groups based on skin-color]—*but right through every human heart.*” “All have sinned, and fallen short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). Our rebellion against God has resulted in broken relationships—between God and man, between man and his fellow man, and between man and creation.

What is the solution? The cross of Christ. On the cross, God incarnate bore the punishment we deserved for sinful rebellion in order to show us mercy we could never deserve. His death on the cross and His resurrection opened the way for the reconciliation of all of our broken relationships.

Postmodern critical theory sources evil not in human hearts, but in social structures. The Biblical worldview, by contrast, views evil not as structural, but as personal. Injustice exists because we are all fallen, sinful, selfish people. The only solution is a personal, heart-level transformation, not just for a

particular group of so-called “oppressors,” but for everyone. There is no hope for lasting social change apart from the gospel and new life in Christ.

Unlike postmodern critical theory, the biblical view of transformation encompasses both the inward and the outward, the personal and the societal, the regeneration of fallen human hearts and minds and the reformation of society. As Dallas Willard wisely said:

The revolution of Jesus is a revolution of the human heart or spirit. It did not and does not proceed by means of the formation of social institutions and laws ... Rather, it is a revolution of character, which proceeds by changing people from the inside through ongoing personal relationship to God in Christ and to one another. It is one that changes their ideas, beliefs, feelings, and habits of choice, as well as their social relations. From these divinely renovated depths of the person, social structures will naturally be transformed so that “justice roll[s] down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream” (Amos 5:24).

Yes, we all long to see our broken, hurting society healed. But the solutions provided by postmodern critical theory only make things worse by misdiagnosing the problem. It isn't the patriarchy or white supremacy, and it certainly isn't the male-female binary. Unjust and oppressive human systems, structures, institutions, laws, and norms are symptoms, not the disease. The disease is sin. It is alienation from God. The solution is inward heart and mind transformation through the gospel, leading to outward, societal transformation.

Keller again:

- “[Critical theory] denies our common sinfulness. The Bible teaches that sin is pervasive and universal. We are each members of a race or nationality that contains much unique common grace to contribute to the world. But every culture also comes with particular sinful idolatries. *No race or people group is inherently more sinful than others.*”
- [According to postmodern critical theory] “All unequal outcomes in wealth, well-being, and power is never due to individual actions or to differences in cultures or to differences in human abilities, but only and strictly due to unjust social structures and systems. The only way to fix unequal outcomes for the downtrodden is through social policy, never by asking anyone to change their behavior or culture.”

When you combine the critical theory views of ultimate reality, power, human identity, and morality you begin to see how it can only lead to a fractured, tribalistic world of identity groups competing for power. As Keller says, it “*makes forgiveness, peace, and reconciliation between groups impossible.*”

My point with this brief worldview analysis is this: Biblical Christianity and postmodern critical theory are distinct and incompatible worldviews. They are opposed in their understanding of ultimate reality, power, authority, human nature, morality, epistemology, and much more. These differences matter. They will inevitably lead to vastly different kinds of societies.

The culture that is emerging around us from the worldview of critical social theory is one marked by hostility, division, and a false sense of moral superiority. A culture where truth is replaced by power, and gratitude by grievance. A culture where people are encouraged to put on the mantle of the victim. A culture where personal responsibility is eroded, and where people increasingly blame their problems on

others. A culture marked by sexual libertinism. A culture where your identity is defined by your tribe and your tribe is always in conflict with other tribes.

I don't want to live in this kind of culture. I want to live in a culture where truth, justice, and love are the highest goods. A culture where God is honored as King, and all people, regardless of their race, sex, or class are respected and loved as His beloved children. A culture where people are judged by "the content of their character, not the color of their skin." A culture in which justice is based on God's unchanging moral law and those accused of injustice are treated with fairness and impartiality. A culture that upholds due process and the rule of law. A culture that sees all people as fallen sinners, yet objects of God's love, mercy, and forgiveness.

A culture marked by grace, tolerance, and forgiveness. A culture where reconciliation and redemption are possible. A culture marked by humble gratitude.

My main concern, however, is for the church. I see growing evidence that many of my fellow Christians have absorbed, either consciously or unconsciously, many of the presuppositions of postmodern critical theory, and are attempting to conform their biblical theology to support these presuppositions. I don't believe this will be sustainable. One will have to give way to the other.

I don't question their intentions. I believe many have very good intentions. They want to stand against injustice, racism, sexism, and to be a voice for the oppressed, as I do. What they don't seem to understand is that while postmodern critical theory purports to stand for justice and equality, it completely redefines these words to align with its worldview presuppositions. Take the word "justice" for example. The definition of justice that emerges from the Scriptures would be something like this:

Conformity to God's moral standard as revealed in the Ten Commandments and the Royal Law: "love your neighbor as yourself." Justice entails giving people their due as image-bearers of God. It also entails fairly and impartially rendering judgment, righting wrongs, and meting out punishment for lawbreaking. This aspect is reserved for God, and God-ordained authorities including parents in the home, elders in the church, teachers in the school, and civil authorities in the state.

According to postmodern critical social theory, however, justice is redefined to mean something like this:

Deconstructing systems and structures deemed to be oppressive, and redistributing power and resources from oppressors to their victims in the pursuit of equity, or equality of outcome.

Same word. Different dictionaries. Which definition is true? Unless Christians are aware of how such definitions have changed as postmodern critical theory emerges as the dominant ideology in our culture, they can mistakenly believe they are pursuing justice, yet be actively working against it.

White Supremacy

Here's another phrase that has been redefined. You used it frequently in your last post. A few short years ago, it was used to describe the Ku Klux Klan, Nazis, or racists like Richard Spencer who openly believe people with white skin are superior to people with black or brown skin. But postmodern critical theory gives it a new meaning. Here's DiAngelo: "When I use the term 'white supremacy', I do not use it

to refer to extreme hate groups. I use the term to capture the pervasiveness, magnitude, and normalcy of white dominance and assumed superiority.”

As James Lindsay explains, “this redefinition is designed to explicitly connect happening to be white with participation in a system of dominance and oppression that marginalizes people of color.” In other words, white supremacy now applies to pretty much any person with white skin. The only way out is to renounce your white privilege, and otherwise fully endorse the presuppositions of critical race theory.

And what are the hallmarks of this culture of white dominance that critical race theorists point to? They include (according to a recent [infographic from the Smithsonian Museum of African-American History](#)):

- Hard work
- Punctuality (Timeliness)
- Self-reliance
- Politeness
- Objectivity

Who knew these things were aspects of white supremacy? You wrote about “evangelicalism’s lock-step partnership with white supremacy,” and Booker T. Washington’s “accommodation of white supremacy.” This can only make sense if you are using DiAngelo’s redefinition.

Marxism, Communism and American Liberalism

I need to wrap this up, but want to comment briefly on a few other points you made. You wrote: *“Neither communism, nor Marxism, nor social critical theories have lifted a pinky finger to accomplish slavery, Jim Crow, Segregation, lynchings, massacres, etc. Only American Liberalism has done that, because only American Liberalism has ever held true power in America, largely under ‘Christian’ leadership.”*

Marxist/Communist regimes are responsible for over 100 million people being starved, slaughtered, and imprisoned in the 20th century alone. Many millions were enslaved in gulags and forced labor camps. It is still happening today. Nearly one million Uighurs are enslaved in concentration camps run by the Chinese Communist Party right now. They are being systematically tortured, brainwashed, and killed for their body parts. Yet you imply that Marxism isn’t the real problem, rather it is the dark and malevolent force of “American Liberalism.”

But is slavery a distinct byproduct of American Liberalism and Christianity, as you suggest? Rather, isn’t slavery common in cultures worldwide? Even today, slavery exists in places like Mauritania and Libya, which are hardly bastions of American Liberalism, or Christianity.

Third, I’m fine with you highlighting the shameful aspects of American history as you do here. I too teach all of these things to my children. But I’m not fine if you completely ignore the other list, which is also the fruit of American Liberalism and Christianity:

- The world’s first organized anti-slavery society was formed in Pennsylvania in 1774.
- The first legal ban on slavery anywhere in the world was in Vermont in 1777.

- Five of the original 13 states followed suit either during or immediately after the Revolution, passing bans on slavery between 1780 and 1784.
- The first federal ban on slavery, in the Northwest Territory, was drafted in 1784 by Thomas Jefferson and passed by the Confederation Congress in 1787. Its language would later be adopted directly into the 13th Amendment.
- Congress banned the slave trade at the first possible moment, in 1807, at the insistence of President Jefferson.
- Slavery was eventually abolished after a bloody civil war in which thousands of white people died to end this evil institution.
- Significant progress in racial equality was made through the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 60s, and various affirmative action policies.
- We elected the first black president in 2009, and the whole country celebrated this milestone, even those who disagreed with Barak Obama's policy positions, as I did.
- While America continues to be plagued by overt racism, it is, today, one of the least racist countries on earth, which explains why overwhelming numbers of people, including those with black and brown skin flock to this country, and almost nobody wants to leave it.

This list is also the fruit of American Liberalism. A truthful take on our past acknowledges America's racist history in full, horrific detail, but it also remembers and celebrates all we've done to overcome the evils of racism and racial injustice, and is grateful for those who sacrificed much to bring them about.

Gratitude, however, is a virtue that is notably absent from postmodern critical theory. It is, after all, *critical*. When it comes to America, it focuses only on things to be critical about, and on tearing down. We see this happening literally with the tearing down of statues. This is not a recipe for social harmony, or for reconciliation. I have my fair share of shortcomings and moral failings. I can tell you that if my wife were only critical of me, and only focused on my sins while ignoring any redeeming characteristics, we wouldn't have a particularly healthy relationship.

Fundamentalism

You wrote: "We view most Evangelical criticism of critical theory and BLM [Black Lives Matter] as the same Fundamentalism of a century ago... American Fundamentalism is the main force that has perpetuated segregation to this day, and it is the same force currently trying to silence the cries for reform. We pray daily that this Fundamentalism fails."

I agree that there are striking parallels between our situation today and the church split some 100 years ago between the mainstream denominations and the fundamentalists. I wrote about this in a World Magazine article. [I hope you'll take the time to read it](#). I do not disparage people like J. Gresham Machen, or R.A. Torrey, founder of Biola University. They were not perfect, and their overreaction to the social gospel caused real harm to the church, but to their everlasting credit, they stood firm and preserved the gospel in their generation, while the mainstream churches largely abandoned it in their tragic attempt to accommodate the powerful, unbiblical ideologies of their day. Had they not done this, the church in America today would look a lot more like the nearly extinct church in Western Europe.

Then, and now, the church isn't supposed to blindly follow mainstream cultural trends—even powerful ones with massive elite support and financial backing, like Black Lives Matter, whose founders and leaders openly advocate for their neo-Marxism and postmodern critical theory. Our call is to uphold and live out the counter-cultural ways of Christ's kingdom as salt and light in the midst of an increasingly dark and chaotic culture.

“Who is [sic] your people? Who are you? Is it shibboleth or sibboleth?”

I'm not sure what you are asking here, or why. In my previous post, I mentioned that the phrase “systemic racism” is now so overused, that even those who invoke it struggle to define it. It has become more of a catch-phrase or password (a shibboleth) that people use to signal that they are part of the in-crowd. This is not to say that systemic evil and injustice are not real. They are. But they are not nearly so vague and undefined as people are making them out to be. I'll be the first to stand with you against systemic racism, but I first need to be pretty certain that a system *is* racist, and that means evidence that goes beyond disparities of outcome and that takes into account personal choices and behaviors. Proclaiming a system to be racist when it isn't is unjust and makes things worse. It leaves root problems unaddressed.

Who am I? Who are my people? I'm not sure why you are asking these questions, but here's my straightforward answer. *Who am I?* First and foremost, I'm a child of God, a sinner saved by grace, and a follower of Jesus Christ. I have a unique history, personality, and gifts which I'm grateful for. I'm a proud American. I have a particular calling and vocation which gives great meaning and purpose to my life. *Who are my people?* First and foremost, my wife and five children, my mom and dad, and my sister, brother, grandparents, and in-laws. Second, my brothers and sisters in Christ, including both of you, and in particular, my DNA coworkers and colleagues around the world, and those at our home church whom I know on a very personal level. Third, my fellow Americans. These are my people. “White” doesn't factor into my answer, because my people include those with every skin hue and color.

What does racial reconciliation look like?

You asked, “what does racial reconciliation look like for White Evangelicals? How do you define ‘racial reconciliation’ and what practically would you suggest pastors do to engage their congregations in this work?”

Thank you for asking this very important set of questions. First, I would never presume to speak for a group as varied and amorphous as “White Evangelicals.” Second, I define racial reconciliation as building or re-establishing a culture of trust and love between different racial/ethnic groups where that trust has eroded or broken, and where distrust, enmity and hostility exists.

There are many precious Biblical truths that foster racial reconciliation. These truths have to be taught by faithful pastors and ministers of reconciliation. They include:

- There is only one race, the human race, and all of us are brothers and sisters with the same blood in our veins, and the same ancestors.
- We share a common human nature. We are all created by God in His Divine image and likeness. We are all objects of His love. All people, regardless of ethnicity, skin color, sex, religion, or class possess inherent and incalculable value and worth, along with God-given rights to life and liberty.

- We are all sinners. All of us are more than capable of the most heinous evil. There is no group or ethnicity that is more evil than another. We all stand in need of God's grace and forgiveness, which He freely offers to all people regardless of ethnicity or skin color.
- To those that accept Christ's mercy and forgiveness, they become part of the same family, the children of God, where there "is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, [or black or white], for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3:28).

These truths provide the only solid foundation for genuine racial reconciliation that I know of.

Postmodern critical theory denies each of these truths. You won't find them anywhere in DiAngelo's *White Fragility*, or Kendi's *How to Be an Antiracist*. Instead, critical theory reduces people to impersonal representatives of social groups based on skin color, sex, or sexual orientation. It then pits them against one another without any element of mercy or forgiveness. Keller is exactly right: "It makes forgiveness, peace, and reconciliation between groups impossible."

Another key to racial reconciliation is *truth*. Mistrust and hostility grow in cultures where truth is eroded and replaced by lies, false witness, and false narratives. For example, we regularly hear that the police are killers who have declared "open season" on young black men. Black Lives Matter leaders routinely repeat this line. This isn't so much an exaggeration as an outright lie. It only exacerbates mistrust and hostility. That hostility will continue unless the truth can overcome the lie. Christians ought to be people of truth who refuse to traffic in inflamed or hyperbolic charges that aren't grounded in solid evidence and fact, but only serve to buttress a particular narrative.

Another key is to treat people as unique individuals, and not to dehumanize them as avatars or representatives of groups based on skin color. In King's immortal words: "*I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.*" This statement represented the high-water mark in American race relations because Americans of all skin colors overwhelmingly agreed with him! They said with one, loud voice, "*Yes, this is the kind of America we want to live in too!*"

Tragically, postmodern critical theory has abandoned this dream and moved us backward. Now, skin color is all-important, and the individual person, including the content of their character, no longer counts for much. This isn't progressing, [it's regressing](#). If we want genuine racial reconciliation, we have to reclaim and affirm King's great dream in our generation.

Finally, and as part of the above, we need to hold people accountable for their own sins, and not for the sins of people who lived over a hundred years ago who happen to share their same skin color. You wrote: "the great hope and joy for countless Christian leaders in this season is that repentance leads to reconciliation and restoration, and the Black community is still offering us this reconciliation."

By "us" I assume you mean people with white skin. But do you truly believe that merely based on your skin color, you are morally guilty and need to repent for sins committed by people with the same skin color who may have lived centuries ago? And that if you have black skin, you are, on that basis alone, sinned-against by white people?

Assuming a person is morally guilty or innocent of sin *on the basis of their skin color alone*, and not because of their individual actions and behaviors may be true for postmodern critical theory, but it is unbiblical and unjust. This mindset can only exacerbate racial hostility. Repentance for sin is a hugely important matter. I daily have to repent, but I repent for and am accountable for *my sins*. Not my

parent's sins (Ezekiel 18:20), let alone the sins of complete strangers, simply because we have the same skin color.

Last point: I'm impressed [with this article](#) by George Yancey. He presents many helpful suggestions for improving race relations that I would endorse.

I've gone on far too long. Forgive me. Like you, I have some real passion involved in this issue and get carried away. I count you both as friends, and my great wish for you both is that your lives, families, and ministries will thrive and bear great fruit for God's Kingdom. God bless you both. I look forward to reading your final installment.

In Christ,

Scott

Final Response from Dennaë, August 22, 2020

Scott,

I (Dennaë) write this final instalment, alone. I affirm everything Andrew and I have written together up to this point, but now I want to write as one city leader to another. I care about church unity in this city, but not unity in name only. I want us to embody unity by allowing the gospel to empower us to live in solidarity with the marginalized, poor, and oppressed.

We both believe the other person's motive is a deep concern for the witness of the church and the purity of the gospel. We may also believe the other person's behavior and language is, at least in part, participating with the spirit of the age and sowing dangerous seeds into the soil of God's church.

My final response is written with deep desire and prayer for Christians in our city to repent and participate in a Christian renewal movement that faithfully passes down the Christian faith for generations to come. I do not write this because I am fearful of being on the wrong side of history. I do not write it because I am swept away by some romantic view of justice. I write it because God's amazing grace did not just spiritually save me from a future hell, but also reached into my present hell and delivered me from exclusion, pain, and oppression and brought me into Christ's light, life and family. This resulted in deliverance, adoption, healing to my physical reality, the joy of confession and a commissioning to bring this good news to others. There seems no greater place to give the world a vision of heaven than speaking and embodying Christ in places that give us tastes of hell.

I want the church to be awakened, healed, reformed, and renewed by this gospel. I want God's people in Arizona to receive the benefits of lament and confession. I want them to then go with joy into the most painful parts of our communities and display the kingdom of God as they repair what generations of sin erode. Not to simply try to rid the world of brokenness, but to point our pain-filled world to the future restoration of all things and invite them to join God's mission and display that kingdom now, on earth, as it is in heaven.

I want the wealthy and the poor, the powerful and the oppressed, to see Christ's healing restorative light break into darkness and reconcile us to one another. I want the prideful to delight in being humbled and the humble to delight in being exalted. I want us to pour out our privileges for the weakest among us. The gospel initiates, produces, and sustains this fruit.

I affirm your important desire to preserve gospel centrality; however, the behavior of ignoring evangelicalism's participation in racial injustice and minimizing our role in systemic sin creates barriers to our world clearly seeing and hearing the gospel. I have serious concerns regarding your last response. It is too much to respond fully to so I will highlight 4 that stand out:

1) Your letter is intellectually dishonest. You cherry picked phrases from our last article, pulled them out of context and spent a majority of your response arguing about CRT.

If you wanted to debate CRT, you should have made it explicit from the beginning. I would have turned down that request because I have no interest in giving any time or attention to arguing about CRT.

My theological tradition affirms the creational goodness in all ideologies while also critiquing the ways they are distorted and distracting from Christ. Any affirmation we made was an attempt to (i) model

that there are things to learn from social theories, but more importantly (ii) that the main voice we draw from comes from 300 years of Black church history. Just because there is shared language with social theorists and black Christian's critique of white supremacy, does not mean Black Christians are prescribing the same solution as critical theorists or fully making the same critique.

Scott, compared to me-- both in experience and your particular vocational calling-- you have more training and know the rules of honest intellectual dialogue. I entered this discussion trusting you to debate on a set of simple rules of intellectual engagement. I think you violated those rules in similar ways Neil Shenvi violates these rules. You made many statements about CRT and Marxism that demonstrate a lack of understanding of the complexity and diversity of thinkers on the topic. You even admit to responding to the "lowest common denominator." This is not charitable. There is not space (or interest) to really address the multiple things you mischaracterize about these theories. My concern rests in the behavior of mischaracterizing your opponents as it does not equip Christians to discern the aspects of social theorists that require a Christian response that listens in order to affirm and reject various aspects of it with the gospel.

One of the common behaviors of fundamentalism is to pull things out of context in order to drive home a point you desire to make and because it sounds good to the average listener, they are persuaded while never really dealing with the actual argument that was made in the first place. It isn't relationally or intellectually fruitful to engage in this behavior. This of course can be true of both progressives and conservatives.

2) You changed the topic. You asked me to discuss the language we were using in our Surge communication about racism, systemic oppression, the books of Black Christians we recommended as we engaged with the BLM protests happening within our city. This last letter instead ignored the many points we have made about the witness of the Black church and the call to engage their prophetic critique and instead continue to conflate their voice with CRT.

3) Critical theory. You say it is a competitor to the gospel. *I agree.* American Liberalism is *also* a competitor to the gospel. *All* ideologies are *both* important /complementary *and* competitors to the gospel. As you quoted Keller, you pull his quotes out of the larger context in which he wrote them, use the portions of his article to support the points you wanted to make on CRT and ignore what he said in his previous article (part 1) as well as the fact that his definition of Biblical Justice drastically differs in key areas from what you offer in your letter. This does not feel like honest engagement nor is it my experience of you on other important topics.

I have plenty of thoughts on your critique of social justice, but won't list them here. Of course sin is individual and personal, but Scripture also shows it as systemic and social. There are plenty of thinkers and theologians who write on this, and more important, Scripture is filled with examples. Our first response went into detail about this, and you stated multiple times you agreed in large part, yet your closing arguments seem to undo your initial agreement.

The challenge I often have with your logic is the binaries and either/or you create. Because you create these binaries they always affirm some truths of Scripture. They are accurately describing an aspect of the presenting problems, but in a way that ignores other important truths. I think this is destructive behavior and poorly forms those you influence to discern truth, justice and Christian ethics.

4) Plank/ Speck- You mention this and yet make no mention of the “plank” you have discovered in your own worldview, and in multiple places you uncritically link Christianity to American Liberalism. You make statements such as, “*Ideologies that draw the good vs. evil line between different groups are not just wrong, they are dangerous.*” But then you position the current racial justice movement as evil (because they are influenced by postmodern views of justice) vs. the good (American Liberalism). Do you see the very behavior you are worried about in progressive social movements is exhibited in your own engagement on this topic?

I have no problem affirming Keller’s critique on CRT, especially in light of his definition of biblical justice. But why are you spending so much time defending American Liberalism? *Even if* it is a healthier system. Why nuance or minimize American slavery? Why are you shifting blame of American sins to sins in other countries and times? Why downplay White Supremacy and White Evangelical participation in White Supremacy?

We ask, “who are your people?” because you seem more concerned to defend American Liberalism and protect against Progressivism than leading your followers into a season of repentance and renewal in the gospel during America’s present awakening to racial injustice. Are followers of your organization more likely to be swept up by CRT, *or* to somehow confuse American Liberalism with Christianity? And even if their children are going to be more tempted by unhealthy aspects of CRT, is the way to articulate and form the next generation in the gospel going to be accomplished by trying to position American Liberalism over against CRT? Or are we instead to demonstrate how the gospel confronts both? And since it confronts both, should we not model humility by repenting of the broken worldviews most dominant in ourselves and our own evangelical culture? This is the intent of the plank/speck passage. It is only from this position that we will really have any credibility to address the problems with progressive ideology.

I do not believe Christians are to defend against or adopt any ideology, but to be an alternative community that challenges and subverts every salvation story in America. We have several hundred years of sermons and writings from the Black church to pull from as examples. This is not a new topic among oppressed and marginalized *Christian* brothers and sisters. The question remains, why can’t you hear their voice? Why do you continue to conflate them with CRT and Marxism?

To make it simple and clear: both Christians and secular people describe injustice and the devastating effects of colonialism and systemic racism. The faithful Christian response is different than the secular progressive response because it offers a path of redemption and reconciliation, not just vindication or deconstruction. It’s not consistent logic to dismiss these claims by arguing they must be coming from CRT writers.

This is another *behavior* of fundamentalism: to dismiss statements because they sound like (or “signal”) something else you disagree with. This is the kind of *behavior* that *both* the left and the right are participating in and it is the kind of *behavior* that harms our American democracy, but more importantly - our Christian witness.

The small part of your response that engaged in the topic we agreed to write on does reveal that we have very different theological understandings of racial reconciliation, sin, and oppression. Honestly, it grieves me. I am not only grieved by the implications of your definitions for reconciliation, but also the behavior of seeding fear into the church at the same time the Spirit of God seems to be asking her to repent and turn from her idolatry, injustice, and pride. The path forward for renewal in the American church will require repenting of both individual *and* generational sin, caring about systemic injustice *and*

individual morality. Repenting of the sins of our forefathers and the ways we blindly participate in them is not a new practice to the Christian faith, but consistent with the biblical narrative.

Sadly, my brother, your definition of reconciliation offers little shared ground to meet on. It sounds the same as those who ignored the calls from Black brothers and sisters to White Christians for generations. Many of the arguments you make are similar in logic to those made by a majority of White evangelicals for 200 years. While you are correct, there were *Christians* (not simply as you said, “American Liberals”), who started abolition movements and marched on Selma (alongside and even following the lead of those from different faiths or no faith), the behavior and posture you take is sadly more aligned with those *Christians* (also American Liberals) who opposed those radical anti-slavery, anti-segregationist Christians. It only takes a little research of original sources to read sermons, news articles, foundational documents of denominations, and denominational meeting notes to see these same arguments you make show up again and again among the white ministers who opposed the work of racial justice.

I am thankful for the Black Lives Matter movement. I am thankful for the Civil Rights movement. I am thankful for the Abolition movement. All mass American social movements that have led to greater justice for marginalized people have involved Christians being present, faithful and a *distinct* witness among massive and diverse groups of people who were awakened to injustice and emboldened to resist it. All of these social justice movements have been incredibly complex, nuanced, not monolithic, and representative of countless religions, organizations, and desired outcomes; all the while having a shared overarching desire to make life more just and equitable for suffering and marginalized people. I believe this is a common grace, a creational desire embedded in the masses regardless of their faith. Why wouldn't Christians want to be active and present in these spaces?

Christians can and should embrace the longing of our nation to expose injustice and address the continued assault on black people. They should be in the room, participating as a *distinct* witness alongside countless others in the work for reform and justice. They should do it as peacemakers and reconcilers. But to even get to that place Christians must repent of our apathy and participation in racism and segregation and evaluate how our own complicity and defense of white supremacy within our structures and traditions continue to pervert our witness to the gospel.

American Liberalism won't save us. Fear of CRT or Marxism won't protect us. The gospel alone is the one to break down the walls of hostility and reconcile us one to another. This reconciliation is not an ethereal or abstract reconciliation, but is the kind of reconciliation that will bear fruit by bringing greater union among one another as it humbles those with privilege to serve the weak and exalts the poor and humble to sit as co-heirs with Christ and God's people.

While I am not advocating for the adoption of progressive ideology and have no illusion of the destructive ways postmodern views of justice can take shape; I am grieved by the participation and marriage of American evangelicals to politically conservative idolatry and the consistent defense of the status quo on America's obvious racial sins.

At times in the prophetic books, pagan nations, more wicked than Israel, were used by God to expose the unjust and immoral behavior of God's people. God's people were not to point to the greater sins of the pagans in an attempt to deflect from their sins, they were instead called to repent and return to their God. And even when they repented, again and again, they refused to “tear down the high places” causing their children and grandchildren to be tempted and ultimately entrapped by false gods. The unfolding American story no doubt has many challenges before it, but what I am most concerned about

is God's people scattered throughout her. Are we ready to "tear down the high places" and have a more faithful witness?

Scott, my brother, I deeply respect the invitation to dialogue with your ministry, the tone in which you engaged us, and the humble gift you give by allowing us the last word. I am sure I wrote many things you would like to nuance or contest. My affection for you remains and where debate cannot bring us into unity, I am confident the Spirit of our Living God will. I simply close out this letter in prayer that American Christians would lament our nation's racial sins, repent, participate in deeper reconciliation and take love and justice for marginalized people far more seriously.

In Christ,

Dennae Pierre