

A CANADIAN REFORMED MAGAZINE

TO ENCOURAGE, EDUCATE, ENGAGE, AND UNITE

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Clarion

*Social Justice and Biblical Justice
Overcoming Racism in Post-
Apartheid South Africa*



Critical Theory

Clarion: a trustworthy and engaging magazine, widely spread and read in Canadian Reformed households and beyond.

To equip God's people for his glory, in faithfulness to Scripture, as summarized in the Reformed confessions, Clarion adheres to the following core values:

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Loving in manner
Attuned to current issues
Readable and Reliable
In Submission to Scripture
Open to constructive criticism
Nurturing Christian living

What's Inside

Dear reader, I invite you to put on your "thinking cap" for this issue! We trust that every issue will give you food for thought, but this time we present a theme issue on the challenging philosophical topic of Critical Theory and some of its offshoots: Critical Race Theory (CRT), social justice, and Black Lives Matter. These are not simple matters to comprehend and yet CRT (in particular) is running wild in many of the leading institutions of North American society (including the mainstream media and social media). As Christians we need to understand what these ideas are all about and learn to analyze them in the light of Scripture. If we don't, we may find ourselves getting swept up in something that may just be in opposition to the Lord Jesus Christ. I encourage you to read these articles carefully and even a second or third time—your time and effort will be rewarded.

We express our thanks to guest writers Robert VanAmerongen (jr.), Rev. Jim Witteveen, Dr. Eric Watkins, and Rev. Dick Wynia for

helping us get a handle on these matters. Dr. Arjan de Visser also adds to this discussion by sharing his experiences working as a white missionary in black South Africa before and after Apartheid. His front-row seat, experiences, and reflections help us understand how the gospel can help overcome long-standing prejudices. My own editorial ties in with these matters by evaluating the very idea of "race" and different human "races" according to God's Word.

Finally, outside of these heavier topics Rev. Winston Bosch meditates on the value of praying the "Our Father" even while doing the mundane tasks of life. MERF presents a newsletter in the form of an "ordinary" gospel conversation in a parking lot, the kind of interchange that any of us might have—encouraging! And a letter to the editor presents another way of thinking about our current housing crisis in Canada that a recent editorial spoke about. Happy reading and may it be edifying!

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EDITORIAL

One Race

Does this kids' song ring a bell? *Jesus loves the little children / All the children of the world / Red and yellow / Black and white / They are precious in his sight / Jesus loves the little children of the world.* Faulty Arminian theology to the side, these words also imply faulty biology, namely that there exist distinct human races, identifiable by skin colour. Growing up, this was the basic view of humanity that I took in from the surrounding culture, but it turns out to be completely false.

Four races?

"Race" has proven difficult to define, but when that song was published in 1913, the common idea was that humans belonged to one of three or possibly four basic groups (races). Scientific terms were given to each and in popular usage a colour was used: Mongoloid/Asian (yellow), Negroid (black), and Caucasian (white). Some counted as a fourth race the Australoids (from Australia and environs, also with black skin). The song's reference to "red" would have referred to North American natives (who were thought to be a sub-species of the Mongoloid race).

From the 1700s well into the twentieth century, these distinctions were believed to be biologically based. Precise origins were debated. At first some thought God created four distinct races simultaneously (which were simply not recorded in Genesis). Charles Darwin's writings (mid 1800s) popularized the idea that the races evolved from a common ancestor, each with their own observable and quite different characteristics and traits. From there it was not hard for people to form a "hierarchy" of races, with one believed to be superior to another. Thus "racism" was formally born (the term originates only recently, in the 1930s, though the idea of prejudicing one people group over another is certainly of ancient vintage).


One family

Yet the Bible tells a much different story. First, the record in Genesis shows that God created Adam and Eve as the first parents of *all* human beings. Eve is described as the "mother of all living" (Gen 3:21). The Bible leaves no room for so-called pre-Adamites or co-Adamites. Adam is described elsewhere as the "first man" (1 Cor 15:45). Paul tells the Athenians that God "made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth" (Acts 17:26). That means that all humans are related as members of one extended human family. There is only one race, the human race.

All humans trace their ancestry back to Adam and even more recently to Noah. In the past, some have thought that the black race descended from Noah's son Ham, who was believed cursed for ridiculing his father. Many of Ham's descendants came to live in Africa (those of his sons Cush, Egypt, and Put; Gen 10:6) and since people from that area have black skin, it did not take much for some to look upon all black-skinned people as an inferior race living under divine curse. That in turn gave justification for many white Europeans to become owners of black African slaves.

Such reasoning, however, is nonsense and totally without biblical foundation. Noah did pronounce a curse because of Ham's sin, but the curse was placed upon Ham's son Canaan, and not on Ham himself or his other sons. Canaan's fate was to be "a servant of servants" to his brothers, particularly to Shem (Gen 9:25-26). Canaan became the father of the Amorite tribes who lived in the land of Canaan (9:15-19). These indeed were subjugated by Israel, the offspring of Shem, and even put to death as a result of God's holy judgment against their many sins (15:16-21). And that's where Noah's curse stops. Further, Canaanites were never known to have black skin.

Simply put, the Bible teaches that all of humanity comes from one set of parents, that all are made in the image of God, and whatever differences there are in skin colour, traits, language, and culture have no bearing on their standing before God. All are equal to him. The concept of multiple "races" is a man-made idea that should be rejected by all, especially Christians. Humanity is *biologically* one brotherhood that has woefully been divided by the corruption of human sin. The good news is that in Christ, humans from every tribe, nation, and tongue are being brought together into one new *spiritual* brotherhood where love and peace prevail.

Of course, this is a work in progress, led by Christ's Spirit. In the church, the assortment of skin colours, traits, and cultures are neither to be ignored nor prejudiced but celebrated as part of the wonder of God's good creation. Then unity will grow in diversity as the redeemed nations learn to sing God's praises together and forever (Ps 45:17). 



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God Is My Father

“Our Father in heaven . . .” (MATTHEW 6:9)

My early morning routine includes taking Rudy, our ten-year-old Schnauzer, for a walk around the block. While he sniffs around and “does his business,” I try to pray through the Lord’s Prayer. I pray each phrase of the prayer, adding my own words as I go, pausing every once in a while to pick up after Rudy. (God made the dog, so I’m sure he doesn’t mind the interruption.) Sometimes I make it through the whole prayer, sometimes we are back at the house before I get to daily bread.

The prayer starts with: “Our Father.” On a good day I dwell on this a bit as I walk the neighbourhood. Faith in Jesus the only begotten Son means I am now one of many beloved sons and daughters. God is my Father. I let this truth percolate in my heart like the coffee that is waiting for me at home. Imagine the most tender and loving human father possible, and then multiply it by, oh let’s say a million billion. That is God’s fatherly heart toward you in Christ! Amazing. And it’s true even when you are sleepy-eyed and stumbling around the block picking up after your dog.

“Our Father in heaven.” The Heidelberg Catechism Lord’s Day 46 says that the words “in heaven” “teach us not to think of God’s heavenly majesty in an earthly manner, but to expect from his almighty power all things we need for body and soul.” Read that again. The contrast is between fathers on earth and the Father in heaven. There is a big difference. Our fathers on earth, even if they are good dads like my dad, don’t always meet our expectations. No surprises there, they are human after all. Fathers on earth don’t always give us what we need, and when they try, they sometimes still mess up. Just ask my own kids. But the Father in heaven is an entirely different story. Our Father in heaven doesn’t make parenting mistakes. He never misjudges, he never tries and then fails, he is never too busy, and he never lacks care and concern. When you pray to him you can be confident that he will generously give you exactly what he knows you need.

So, on a good day, as my dog sniffs and goes about his “business,” I pray “Our Father in heaven” and meditate on the fact that God is a Father who doesn’t fail like human dads do. He is a heavenly Father who comes through for his children. I might pray words like: “O LORD help me not to project on you the faults of earthly fathers; give me instead great expectations of what you will do in my life!” Now that starts to wake you up! It is early, but now I’m eager to see how God will answer the rest of the prayer. Now I’m opening my sleepy eyes and waiting and watching for God to do great things. I’m not talking to any old earthly father; I’m praying to our Father in heaven!

I’m quite sure my dog Rudy doesn’t understand any of this. He has been with us ten years and sometimes I think he is barely a Christian dog. Then again, I’m not always much better. On bad days I can make a mess of things before my post prayer-walk coffee has had a chance to go cold. Praise God that in Jesus Christ God is my Father in heaven! I trust him, and I expect great things from him. I know he will pick up after me. ☺

For further study

1. How did or does your earthly dad reflect something of the character of your heavenly Father?
2. Do you pray and actually expect God to respond? Why or why not?
3. What does Luke 11:11-13 and Ephesians 3:20 teach us about prayer?
4. Read Matthew 6:25-7:12 for further study on the goodness of our heavenly Father.



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Critical Theory

In order that we as members of the church might more fully understand the culture in which we live, in this article I will provide a summary of the historical roots of Critical Theory. We'll look at what it was at its founding and then briefly outline of what it looks like now, both in the university and in the rest of culture. Critical Theory can be defined as a set of ideas which describes what is wrong with the culture and people (often referred to as their "illnesses"), and then provides a map leading to a place of freedom for the individual person and the curing of his ills. Other articles in this issue will cover those more current outgrowths of Critical Theory (such as Critical Race Theory) in more detail.

The hermeneutics of suspicion: Nietzsche, Freud, and Marx

In order to understand how we have arrived at a place where Critical Theory and its philosophical offspring have taken over the university departments and have become the dominant worldview opposing Christianity in the Western world, we should first briefly look at some historical characters. We'll look at the existentialist philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, the psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, and the political theorist Karl Marx as well as the Enlightenment thinker, Jean Jacques Rousseau before addressing the founding of Critical Theory proper. Together, the ideas and methods of the first three men mentioned above have been understood as a "hermeneutics of suspicion," a hermeneutic being a method of interpretation. Their method can be summarized as the notion that things are not what they seem (and in fact are much worse).



Friedrich Nietzsche

Friedrich Nietzsche

Nietzsche, born in 1844, the son of a Lutheran pastor, had a very different view of reality than his father. He believed that all the activities of the various forms of life (from the running deer to the feeling of euphoria that comes after scoring a goal on the rink), though they may seem to be caused by a whole host of unique motivations, are really instances of what he called the "will-to-power." This power, which underlies everything for Nietzsche, would take the place of God in his worldview, the God in whom we confess to "live and move and have our being"

(Acts 17:28). We know that that which underlies everything is a God who is love; in Nietzsche's view, everything at bottom is power—might is right. He therefore considered the idea of God as suffering servant a kind of heresy against reality. What Nietzsche teaches is that we should be suspicious of all those who claim to be motivated by any higher motivation (love, joy, the desire for peace), as the only truly ultimate motivating force in his view is power and the desire for it.

Sigmund Freud

Born in 1856, Sigmund Freud was also a German, the son of Ashkenazi Jews. He, like Nietzsche, was an atheist and more specifically a materialist. This means that he saw the world as a kind of machine, each part influencing the others but with nothing outside of that system, and he saw the individual in the same way. Such a materialistic worldview is one with no room for God.

Freud is significant as the founder of psychoanalysis, the study of abnormal psychological conditions—basically, he studied disturbed people. He theorized, among other things, that our sexual development from childhood to adulthood followed a path which resulted in each boy desiring to sleep with his mother and therefore seeing his father as an enemy to be destroyed; each girl in turn wants to sleep with her father and therefore sees her mother as a rival. All this takes place in the unconscious realm, excusing Freud from needing to provide much evidence for his theory. This arrangement of desire, or *libido*, as Freud named it, shapes and underlies all the actions and thoughts of each individual. This way of seeing the development of the child calls into question every person's motives when they perform actions or experience emotions which we would usually consider good or normal. Freud's suspicion leaves the once-blissful familial home fraught with pent-up sexual tensions which need to be studied and managed. The "normal" behaviour of "normal" people turns out, for Freud, to be a kind of false consciousness, something we'll see again with Marx.

Karl Marx

In 1818, a few years before the two prior thinkers, Marx was born in Germany to Jewish parents who later converted to Christianity. As a political and economic philosopher and a materialist, Marx saw history as a story of class struggle, the lower classes forced to serve the higher. Many of his followers interpreted this dynamic as necessarily leading to revolutionary action. Yet although he believed that his method of approaching



Sigmund Freud

history was a scientific one which could study history and make credible predictions for the future, he criticized the overly theoretical approach of his peers saying that "philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it." Although a materialist, he still believed deeply in the power and necessity of people in bringing about the communist revolution.

Key here is that this "scientific" method, which involves the "ruthless criticism of all that exists," is a kind of criticism which never fails to reveal how history is really at bottom a war of the oppressed class against the ruling class, the *proletariat* against the *bourgeoisie*. If an individual does not agree to this framing of the world, if they profess to be happy and content as a member of the working class, they are—according to Marx and friends—suffering from so-called *false consciousness*. About a century later, the critical theorists would adopt this concept and his call to criticize culture endlessly (hence the name "Critical Theory") in order to reveal the true dynamics of class struggle hidden beneath the layers of common sense. They would also share Marx's fondness for diagnosing with a mental illness those who display in their lives fundamental disagreements about worldview and this can be seen even today with the proliferation of words with the suffix "-phobia," "transphobia" being one of the most recent additions.

Critical Theory looks and functions very much like a religion

Rousseau

All of these thinkers are from the turn of the twentieth century, but in order to reveal the source of some of their moral instincts, it's necessary to bring up a figure who still represents a form of liberalism today—Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Born in 1712, he was a French philosopher of the Enlightenment, a time of great technological advances and the rise of secular humanist philosophy. I mention him to allow him to describe a particular way of looking at the world and human nature. Possibly the most famous of his aphorisms is “Man was born free but everywhere he is in chains.” Here are two ideas: first, man himself in his natural state is free and it is *society* which limits that freedom—and therefore it is society which must be changed if man is to regain that freedom; second, there is a “state of nature,” as he phrases it, in which it is possible for man to dwell, before any society is established.

The establishment of society, Rousseau writes in another punchy paragraph, begins when “the first man who, having fenced in a piece of land, said, ‘This is mine.’” Private property for Rousseau is an illusion and the beginning of everything bad in humanity—envy, hatred, murder, etc. This notion that nature is a

neutral or good place in which a basically good humanity could live happily and blissfully if they didn't ruin it all with society and culture is one that *our* culture has never been able to shake off. It's there in Nietzsche in his idolization of the natural and quite clearly visible in Marx when he writes about the Communist Utopia, a place where I can “hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic.” In our present age, Rousseau's vision provides a goal for the critical theorists—to free the individual from the shackles of society's institutions, marriage, family, church, and nationality—while Nietzsche, Freud, and Marx provide a method they might use to attain that goal.

Horkheimer and friends: the Frankfurt School

Following the second world war, a group of Marx's disciples desperately searched for a way to understand what had happened in Nazi Germany—how a well-educated and apparently moral nation could do what they did, be led astray as they had been—and how they might ensure that something so terrible never happened again. The Frankfurt School, as they were called, was formed in 1923 in order to further the study of Marxism in Germany.

Max Horkheimer, later to go on to serve as the director of the Frankfurt School, was born in Germany to conservative Jewish parents, his father a successful textile merchant. As director of the school, he wrote many works describing Critical Theory and outlining its goals. The method of the school was to critique modernity and “capitalist” society and to detect its “pathologies” (illnesses). The goal of the school put most broadly was social emancipation; as Horkheimer writes, critical theory's goal “is man's emancipation from slavery.” The Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy tells us that “a critical theory is adequate only if it meets three criteria: it must be explanatory, practical, and normative, all at the same time.” In other words, it must explain the world and its problems, propose solutions to those problems, and provide a vision for a better future on the other side of those problems.

It's clear from this summary that Critical Theory looks and functions very much like a religion, and it is my belief that we



Jean-Jacques Rousseau

should treat it as such. Horkheimer and his fellow intellectuals expanded on the ideas of their predecessors: Marx's critique of "capitalism," Nietzsche's "will-to-power," Rousseau's "state of nature," and Freud's "de-normalizing" (to coin a phrase) of typical human dynamics. Especially among the first generation of thinkers at the school, these critical theorists believed in man's ability to create *his own* history, and so they saw it as a worthy goal to remove all obstacles to that freedom, thus clearing the ground for a form of democracy in which each individual could express their true selves. It follows from this conclusion that any and all social institutions such as marriage, family, church, even a social club may be seen by these thinkers as obstacles blocking the way to their ultimate goal, the fully free individual and his fully representative democracy.

The social and intellectual spirit which emerged from the Frankfurt School is sometimes broadly called "cultural Marxism," a hotly contested term. But whether the term is appropriate, it's certainly true that the ideas of the school now appear everywhere in academia and in the broader culture—and everywhere Marxist and Freudian terms like "fetishization," "commodification," and "reification" appear, now often in different contexts than they were originally employed by their authors. The critical theorists applied the concepts more broadly, taking up Marx's directive towards "the ruthless criticism of all that exists." Their ideas and methods have spread even further afield and are manifested today in universities as new disciplines with names like Critical Race Theory, Gender Theory, Literary Theory, even such strange names as Critical Gerontology ("critical" is the adjective to look out for).

Conclusion

Although many well-established scholars in the university are content to merely criticize the culture, their young students will often immediately seek to change the world upon graduation. And while it might be easier for the professor to believe that the oppressive forces of culture are undefeatable, their activist students show by their politics that they may truly believe in a future place where the tentacles of capitalism, patriarchy, racism, and other (in their view) slimy things cannot reach and where everyone is happy, "body positive," "sex positive," "race conscious," and more generally "inclusive." Following Marx, they believe that while the "ruthless criticism" and interpretation of the world is good, "the point is to change it." The critic is necessary, the activist is righteous. Luckily, these two roles can easily be combined by logging on to Facebook or Twitter.

What is the Christian to do in the face of this new world-view? First, realize that these are not new ideas at all. We should recognize the same spirit behind the words of the serpent in the garden, one which picks language into pieces to reveal the "true" badness underneath ("Did God really say . . .?"). We must also remind ourselves about the Truth. God is the Creator, and we all are his creatures. It's true that we are sinful and broken, yes, in even more ways than the critics claim. Yet we are redeemed in Christ and as such we are both far worse and far better beings than the new theorists would have us believe.

Reality is also not class struggle, not merely the result of convolutions of matter in history. Instead, reality is created by God and filled with his creatures, each made to glorify him in its own way, each of infinite value. In the same way, the dynamics of a family cannot be accurately described by the mere sexual urges of its members and their various psychological hang-ups. Because of our nature as the crown of creation, any psychological mechanisms observed or imagined by the psychoanalyst or any social movements noted or projected by the economist are perhaps merely ripples on the surface of the far deeper thing that God created in his children, you and I.

The spirit underneath all things is also certainly not Nietzsche's "will-to-power," the will to dominate all other things, but instead is God's will, for he "works in [us] to will and to work for his good pleasure" (Phil 2:13) and "all things were created through him and for him . . . in him all things hold together;" (Col 1:16-17) and further, as Paul says, "in him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). Not even the animals which we might see as simple and stupid are nearly so simple as we imagine; it is our lack of wisdom and godly imagination which leads us to think in those ways and it is exactly those virtues which the critical theorists and their forefathers lack. We do not look underneath the workings of reality in order to find the bad lurking there, nor do we use those flaws to disrupt and dismantle our cultural institutions—we can see the bad all too well for we know mankind's nature as intimately as we know ourselves. Instead, we look with the eyes of Christ, using our godly imagination to see each person we meet as a creature of the Creator and then to look for what can be redeemed and restored in this culture which we inherited and in which we live. 📖



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Christians and Critical Race Theory

(Part 1)

Before delving into the history of Critical Race Theory (CRT) and an examination of its core beliefs, I am going to begin this article in the “first person”—by telling the story of my own personal life experience. One of the foundational principles of CRT is that “narrative” plays an essential role in the discussion of ideas and decisions about what course of action can be considered just and right in a given situation. In the words of psychologist Dan McAdams, narratives are much more than mere stories that we tell. By using narrative forms (stories), we explain our worldview, and we seek to convince others that our beliefs and values are correct.

Given the nature of CRT, my own personal narrative is not going to lead its adherents to accept anything that I have to say; just the opposite is in fact true. However, I have to give it a shot. At the very least, my narrative will accomplish the goal that I set out for it—it will serve to explain the nature of CRT and why it is a destructive ideology that must be completely rejected by Christians.

We begin with the basic Christian presupposition that racism is a sin that cannot be tolerated among God’s people; that is

a given. Hatred or abuse directed toward another person for whatever reason, including the colour of his or her skin, is sinful and abhorrent. Therefore, it is not the fact that advocates of CRT wish to solve the problem of racism that will be called into question in this article. Rather, it is the ideology’s seriously flawed theoretical basis that must be critically examined, because it leads to real-life applications that only serve to make the problem worse. And when Christians, often unknowingly, begin to echo the rhetoric of CRT and govern their speech and actions according to its worldview, they are actually aiding those who wish to demolish the Christian worldview and everything it stands for.

My personal narrative

But before getting into details, I need to return to my narrative. This is my story. I am a fifty-year-old white male. I am a second-generation Canadian, a child of Dutch immigrants. My father was a dairy farmer, and his success in the agricultural industry as well as his money-management skills have led to me experiencing a life of privilege. The evils of racism have never

led to diminished opportunities in my life. I have never experienced what it is to be “racialized,” nor have I faced discrimination in the job market because of my Northern European ethnic origins. I have never had to fear that members of law enforcement would treat me differently because of the colour of my skin.

I am, however, married to a first-generation Canadian who is of Mexican ethnicity. She is dark-skinned and has physical features typical of many who come from the region in which she was born, where people descended from African slaves intermarried with those of Spanish descent as well as Mexico’s indigenous population. However, the fact that I am married to a “racialized” woman does not win me any points, I understand. It does not prove that I am not a racist; in fact, it may even be a sign of underlying racist attitudes on my part, because perhaps I chose to marry a non-white woman because I knew that I would be able to dominate her, relating to her from my position of power. She has integrated into my almost exclusively white church culture, and almost all of her friends are of European descent. She is also religiously and politically conservative, which means that, in actuality, she is a traitor to her race, and most likely a self-loathing racist herself.

Therefore, what I have to say can be safely disregarded by anyone holding to the values of CRT. I speak from a position of privilege and power, and I have not declared myself to be “anti-racist,” nor have I ever spoken the words, “Black Lives Matter” or used them to frame my profile pictures on social media. I don’t feel the need to “check my privilege,” when making an argument, and I have never apologized for the ways in which I have perhaps acted in racist ways or committed “micro-aggressions” without even realizing that I have done so. I believe that I am not a racist. I believe that racism and ethnocentrism (the belief that one’s own ethnic group is superior to all others) are sinful beliefs and behaviours that are found among members of every ethnic group, and cannot simply be characteristics limited to people in positions of power and privilege.

That is my narrative. And my narrative makes it very clear, to anyone who holds to the tenets of CRT, that I am a racist of the first order. There is nothing that I can say or do, outside of echoing the talking points of the CRT narrative and perhaps taking a knee in a demonstration, that can redeem me. When I say, “I don’t see colour,” for CRT advocates that is an inherently racist statement. If I were to say, “All lives matter,” that statement too

would mark me out as an incorrigible racist. And even if I were to do all of these things (or even much more), I would still be viewed with suspicion at best, although I could perhaps gain the credentials of an anti-racist ally of the CRT movement.

The roots of CRT

Critical Race Theory was born in the halls of academia—specifically in the law schools of the United States—in the 1980s. The original CR theorists built on and reshaped the Critical Theory of the Institute for Social Research, better known as the Frankfurt School. In their legal education context, the pioneers of CRT adapted the foundational doctrines of Marxism to better fit a society in which the defining divisions are not between the *bourgeoisie* (those who have the power and wealth) and the *proletariat* (those who don’t), but between members of the dominant race (people of European descent) and those of other ethnic backgrounds (particularly African-Americans in the original American context).

From the law schools, CRT spread to the universities. From there, it percolated into society, politics, and education, where it now dominates a discussion that is controlled and shaped by our intellectual elites. As Angela Davis writes in her introduction to Richard Delgado’s seminal work on the subject, “critical race theory has exploded from a narrow sub-specialty of jurisprudence chiefly of interest to academic lawyers into a literature read in departments of education, cultural studies, English, sociology, comparative literature, political science, history, and anthropology around the country.”¹

The core tenets of CRT

For a definition of CRT, we look to Richard Delgado, one of the academic theorists who played a central role in developing and popularizing the ideology. According to Delgado, the core tenets of CRT include the belief that racism is not the exception, but the rule. We cannot simply acknowledge that yes, there are some (or perhaps many) racists in our society, and that their racist attitudes and actions must be deplored and opposed. Instead, we must recognize the fact that racism plays a central role in every aspect of our culture, because it serves the purposes of those who have the power. Racism is not an anomaly; it is universal.

¹ Delgado, Richard and Stefancic, Jean. *Critical Race Theory*. New York University. 2017 (2001): p.xvi.

When Christians begin to echo the rhetoric of CRT and govern their speech and actions according to its worldview, they are actually aiding those who wish to demolish the Christian worldview and everything it stands for


Secondly, a powerful majority within our society has no incentive to eradicate racism, because it works for them. Institutionalized racism unites white elites with the white working class, because it offers material benefits to the elites, while offering psychological benefits to the working class. A blue collar white male may not benefit financially from societal racism, but he benefits emotionally and psychologically. Even if he lives near the poverty line himself, he can still consider himself to be “better” than his black co-worker by virtue of the fact that he’s white; despite his own personal struggles and difficulties, his self-esteem is left intact.

Delgado’s third tenet is a strange one, because it actually militates against his basic argument. He asserts (correctly) that “race and races are products of social thought and relations, categories that society invents, manipulates, or retires when convenient.”² I say that this is a strange argument for him to make because CRT appears to do exactly what Delgado is saying here—it manipulates the concept of race for the sake of its own ideology. If the concept of race does not reflect reality, how is it possible to base an entire theoretical system, as well as the practical outworking of that system, on something that doesn’t exist?

The idea of “intersectionality” is the next foundational element of CRT. I am white, I am a man, I am heterosexual, and I am a Christian. Therefore, I have four strikes against me, because all four aspects of who I am speak to the powerful, privileged position in which I find myself. The various elements of my identity “intersect” in such a way as to define my overall identity and how my narrative should be received. A white

Christian heterosexual woman exists in a slightly higher place on the scale of intersectionality; she doesn’t have the privilege of being male, but she does benefit from being white, Christian, and heterosexual. The list could go on, but the point is that when it comes to deciding whose voice deserves to be taken more seriously, every one of the various identities that we have must be taken into account.

Finally, Delgado says, people of colour have a unique voice that must be heard. Only people of colour can speak to issues of racism from a place of personal experience. Their role is to share their stories with their white counterparts in order to inform us about matters about which we cannot be aware, because we have never experienced them personally. It is particularly in this area that narrative becomes important, because personal stories and personal perspectives must take precedence over against rigid moral and legal systems that are based on timeless principles and universally applicable ethical systems.

In the end, CRT is not only a dangerous and destructive ideology, one that leads to increasing division and antipathy between people of different ethnic backgrounds—it is also completely incoherent, and can not stand up to logical scrutiny. 



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² Ibid, p.9.

Social Justice and Biblical Justice?

The phrase “social justice” has become increasingly popular, especially since the tragic death of George Floyd. But when people use the phrase “social justice,” what exactly is meant by it, and how might it differ from distinctively *biblical* justice? First, we must define the difference between social justice and biblical justice and then compare the two.

What is social justice?

The current Wikipedia entry, taken from *Oxford Languages*, defines social justice as “justice in terms of wealth, opportunities, and privileges within a society.”¹ An article from the United Nations suggests that “social justice may be broadly understood as the fair and compassionate distribution of the fruits of economic growth.”² Social justice movements embody a sensitivity to the way in which particular people groups defined by race or gender have been hindered in the past from social, legal, and economic opportunities, and the ways in which those

disparities might be repaired. But no singular definition can encompass all that the social justice movement entails. In fact, it may be better to call them *descriptions* of social justice rather than definitions.

In some studies of its history, the idea of social justice goes as far back as Plato’s Republic and, of course, to Christianity. Plato’s concerns, however, would not match the popular definitions of our day, as the practice of slavery was then alive and well, and issues such as the treatment of women and gender issues were much different than they are in their current forms. And much of what is called social justice today is at odds with biblical teaching. Still, concerns for the just treatment of people have been expressed throughout history, in and out of the church.

Along the secular trail, social justice took particular shape after major events such as the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution. Concerns for justice, particularly as it related to social status, economic opportunity, and legal equity became

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_justice

² “Social Justice in an Open World: The Role of the United Nations” (New York: 2006), <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/ifsd/SocialJustice.pdf>.

Definitions have changed. Goals have changed. Social justice has changed.

significant points of concern in the twentieth century in schools of thought like the Frankfurt School in Germany.³ This school birthed the ideology known as “Critical Theory,” from which descended what is now well-known as “Critical Race Theory.” Critical Theory drew largely from Modernistic and Marxist hopes for a secular utopia in which a world that was free from God (Modernism) would reach a point of blissful economic equilibrium through the distribution or redistribution of wealth (Marxism). But note, it is both true yet simplistic to attach social justice to Marxism, as many of the early architects of Critical Theory were also critical of Marxism. Still, they drew from its ideological well at numerous points, especially the tendency to categorize all people and institutions into the binary categories of “oppressor” or “oppressed.”

Current trends

Contemporary movements like Critical Race Theory and intersectionality would build on Critical Theory’s foundation, applying much of the same rubric to discussions about race and gender, with notable momentum in the areas of transgender and homosexual social status. It is particularly here that we see the postmodern influence on the current narrative of social justice, as earlier social justice movements clearly held to different moral commitments than we find in the social justice movements today. Many of the things being advocated by a social justice movement like Black Lives Matter would not have been deemed morally acceptable by leaders like Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Civil Rights Movement. Definitions have changed. Goals have changed. Social justice has changed.

To be clear, social justice is not a static movement or ideology, but an ever-changing one, as elastic as the postmodern ethos that undergirds it. At its best, it is a movement aimed at treating all people equitably, particularly as it relates to economic, social, and legal opportunity. At its worst, social justice is a subversive movement that stands in opposition to God-given definitions of

what it means to bear the image of God, and God’s intentions for the family, the church, and the state. In many ways, social justice, in its contemporary form, stands in stark contrast to biblical ideas of justice. This is why the term “social” is so important; it is not merely aimed at social spheres; it is also derived from social (man-made and ever-changing) views.

So, how does social justice compare with biblical justice?

Comparison and critique

No one could deny that justice is a biblical idea—and a very important one. God himself is a God of justice. All his ways are just (Deut 32:4). His throne is one of justice (Job 8:3). He loves justice (Ps 37:8) and he hates injustice (Isa 61:8). As one author has rightly put it, the greatest injustice in the world is that God is not properly revered and worshipped as he ought to be.⁴ The gospel is the means by which God brings about both justice and reconciliation between God and man. Jesus—the most pure, innocent, and righteous man ever—had to become the victim of the most unjust acts of cruelty recorded in human history. He was falsely condemned and maliciously murdered by unjust people though he had done no wrong. Through the gospel, God is both just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus (Rom 3:21–16). The gospel alone can bring true justice, healing, and reconciliation, as in Christ “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male or female,” but rather we are one in him (Gal 3:28).

Perhaps the most glaring problem with the social justice movement is its starting point. It neglects the Creator-creature distinction between God and man and thus supposes that there can be true and lasting peace on earth apart from recognizing God as Creator and Jesus as Redeemer. But there can never be true horizontal justice and peace (between man and man) apart from vertical justice and peace between God and man through the gospel. Note well: every secular attempt in human

³ For a fuller treatment of the subject see Eric Watkins “Christianity or Critical Theory” <https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/christianity-or-critical-theory>.

⁴ Thaddeus J. Williams, *Confronting Injustice Without Compromising Truth: 12 Questions Christians Should Ask About Social Justice* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2020), 17.

history to create “heaven on earth” has failed—and so has every secular attempt to effect social justice apart from biblical justice.

Another area of concern is one of definition(s). Postmodern authors have rightly recognized that those who get to define terms and ideas maintain power. “Language games,” as they are sometimes called, abound, and the constant redefining of terms is both powerful and confusing. The easiest illustration of this is in the area of gender. What does it mean to be male or female? Are those terms derogatory? Constricting? Unjust? Do they impose on the one labeled either male or female identity structures and expectations that become socially limiting and morally condemning? One can simply look at the soap opera surrounding 2022 women’s swimming competitions for examples of this conundrum. Gender implies identity; identity creates expectations *and boundaries*; boundaries are perceived as social inhibitors . . . but social justice would free people from the so-called identity cages of these traditional (= biblical) definitions of gender. To be clear, the contemporary social justice movement is interested in far more than simply righting racial inequities.


A look in the mirror

But it is not only the social justice movement that needs to be critiqued. Many have wondered, why is it that the social justice movement has gained such momentum not only outside the church but also within it? In other words, why is the social justice movement so attractive—particularly to young people in the church? This is an important question; it would be dangerous to overlook and underestimate it.

The answer is found in the Bible. The Bible says much—so very, very much—about justice and mercy; yet many people look at the church and perceive a lack of concern for justice and mercy—particularly for the marginalized. Yes, we care for our own; but what of those outside? We spend our time, money, and energy building our families, our churches, and our businesses, but are sometimes perceived as having very little interest in the broken, bruised, and disadvantaged around us.

It is not our sins of commission but perhaps our sins of omission that are under the spotlight. Have we “done justice, loved mercy” (Mic 6:8) in ways that honour God, silence our adversaries, and persuade the next generation that we truly love our neighbors as ourselves? In short, social justice is attractive for people who perceive (rightly or wrongly) a lack of biblical justice in the church.

This is a fault line that needs to be explored—humbly, soberly, and seriously. The modern social justice movement foolishly seeks justice without God, his Word, and his gospel. As history has taught us over and over, apart from God and his gospel, there will never be peace on earth. But what an exciting time it is to be the church! For the church holds the key to the healing the world craves and seeks in the social justice lie. The world needs the church to be the church. We are the pillar and buttress of truth (1 Tim 3:15) whose voice the world so desperately needs to hear. We are also the hands and feet of Jesus in the world, showing the love of God for lost people not only by what we say, but also by what we do. So many of the finer “gospel preaching moments” in the New Testament came in the context of tangible expressions of love for those who bear the image of God, yet were in various ways abused, marginalized, and neglected by the world.

The church can (and should) do a better job of demonstrating justice, mercy, and reconciliation than worldly social justice movements. Why? Because we know our Creator, we know our Redeemer, and we know ourselves. No one loved lost, broken sinners more than Jesus; and no one in the world should love them better than the church. 



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What's It All About?

Black Lives Matter

(Part 1)

We've been hearing a lot about Black Lives Matter (BLM) for several years now, but the slogan and the organization behind it became especially prominent in the news in the reaction to the death of George Floyd at the hands of the Minneapolis police in 2020. In itself, the claim that black lives matter is not controversial. Taken at face value, the slogan could simply be a call for society to recognize that the lives of black people are as important as the lives of people of every colour, and an organization by that name could have been established to identify and address incidents of racism.

However, for the people behind the slogan and the organization, Black Lives Matter means much more; for its critics, the organization's philosophy and aims are much more radical and controversial.

A little background

The slogan and the organization are clearly a response to racism, as black people have experienced it in a majority white culture. According to the organization's website, BLM began in 2013, specifically in reaction to the acquittal of George Zimmerman (of Hispanic heritage) on charges of murdering a young black man, Trayvon Martin. In fact, on the website, George Zimmerman is identified as "Trayvon Martin's murderer." The organization's full name is Black Lives Matter Global Network Inc., and it describes itself as a "global organization whose mission is to eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes."¹ It's important to note that BLM speaks about "the violence inflicted on Black communities by *the state*." The organization exists in the U.S., in the U.K., and in Canada.

¹ <https://blacklivesmatter.com/about/>

It's difficult to find a statement that clearly lays out the beliefs and principles on which BLM is based

The founders of BLM identify themselves as “radical Black organizers—Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi.”² In a package of materials prepared for use by teachers in Washington, D.C. schools, BLM spells out thirteen “commitments,” including the commitments to “Restorative Justice,” “Empathy,” “Loving Engagement,” and “Diversity,” as well as to being “Queer” and “Trans” affirming.³ Many have taken particular note of BLM’s commitment to “Black Villages,” which apparently means “disrupting the Western-prescribed nuclear family requirement by supporting each other as extended families and ‘villages’ that care for one another.”

It’s difficult to find a statement that clearly lays out the beliefs and principles on which BLM is based, but, in a 2015 video, Patricia Cullors reportedly described herself and her fellow BLM Organizers as “trained Marxists.”⁴ In December 2020, she addressed this issue, and while she doesn’t really want to get caught up in a debate about Marxism, she freely acknowledges that she believes in Marxism, and that she is advocating for the introduction of a new economic system, in place of capitalism, in which the needs of all citizens are met.⁵ However, according to Marvin Olasky (*WORLD Magazine*, January 15, 2022), since Black Lives Matter focuses on racial injustice rather than economic injustice, it can’t be classified as a purely “Marxist” movement.⁶

“Intentionally targeted for demise”

The view that Black Lives Matter has of life for black people in the U.S., the U.K., and Canada is reflected in this statement:

“Black Lives Matter is an ideological and political intervention in a world where Black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise. It is an affirmation of Black folks’ humanity, our contributions to this society, and our resilience in the face of deadly oppression.”⁷ While he was not speaking on behalf of BLM, Democrat Congressman Hank Johnson gave voice to BLM’s perspective when he said, in response to the police killing of Walter Scott in 2015, “It feels like open season on black men in America, and I’m outraged.”⁸ Similarly, after Ahmaud Arbery was killed by white men in Brunswick, Georgia in February 2021, NBA superstar LeBron James tweeted, “We’re literally hunted EVERYDAY/EVERYTIME we step foot outside the comfort of our homes!”⁹

For BLM and its advocates, what happened in the Trayvon Martin case, along with police shootings of unarmed black people, and courts’ exoneration of police officers and others who have killed black people, prove that the legal system, and especially the police, are corrupted by systemic racism.

Racism: immoral and illegal

When we think of racism, we would probably define it along these lines: the idea that some races (meaning: people groups typically distinguished by skin colour) are by their very nature inferior or superior to other races. Further, racism refers to attitudes and actions that are driven by this idea, and promote it. By this definition, racism is an attitude that is held by individuals, or a description of the actions of certain individuals motivated by

² <https://blacklivesmatter.com/herstory/>

³ <https://www.dcareaeducators4socialjustice.org/black-lives-matter/13-guiding-principles>

⁴ <https://nypost.com/2020/06/25/blm-co-founder-describes-herself-as-trained-marxist/>

⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rEp1kxg58kE&t=9s>

⁶ <https://wng.org/articles/understanding-crt-1640680851>

⁷ <https://blacklivesmatter.com/herstory/>

⁸ <https://thehill.com/blogs/floor-action/house/238634-dem-it-feels-like-open-season-on-black-men>

⁹ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/sports/2020/05/07/lebron-james-ahmaud-arbery-shooting-were-literally-hunted-everyday/>

prejudice against members of another race. There are organizations (like the Ku Klux Klan) that are founded on explicitly racist principles and have racist objectives.

Laws cannot eradicate racism from people's hearts and minds; only the gospel can truly do that. But in both the U.S. and Canada, laws have been enacted to ensure equal treatment of all citizens before the law; other laws have been enacted that characterize racially motivated crimes as "hate crimes." Such laws forbid stirring up hatred against an identifiable group based on colour, race, religion, ethnic origin, or sexual orientation. Officially, then, with respect to their stated laws and policies, our governments treat all citizens on an equal basis. It is illegal for any business or institution to discriminate against any citizen on the basis of colour, race, religion, ethnic origin, or sexual orientation.

Systemic racism: charge and evidence


BLM contends, however, that blacks in the U.S., the U.K., and Canada are not only victimized by racist individuals, or racist organizations, but also by their governments; not by means of explicit policies, but in the form of "systemic racism." Systemic racism is defined as "the systemic oppression of a racial group to the social, economic, and political advantage of another;" "a political or social system founded on racism and designed to execute its principles."¹⁰ Though it is not the only example of systemic racism, apartheid, the policy implemented by the government in South Africa from 1948 until 1994, serves as an illustration of what may be meant by systemic racism. It was openly founded on racist principles and gave advantages to white citizens while it oppressed "coloured" citizens. Many would characterize Canada's past dealings with indigenous peoples as systemic racism.

While officially the governments of the U.S., the U.K., and Canada have outlawed the promotion of racism, and sought to eradicate racism from their policies, BLM insists that black people in these nations are still the victims of systemic racism. They point to the treatment of blacks at the hands of the justice system as the evidence for their claim. They believe that black people are disproportionately victims of violence at the hands of the police, and that whites—and particularly white police officers—who have committed crimes against blacks are not dealt with justly. The legal system is seen as an instrument of white supremacy.

Defund the police: why?

For BLM, then, the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the death of Trayvon Martin is a case in point: a non-black man takes the life of a young black man without justification, but the justice system does not hold him accountable. According to BLM, further notorious incidents in which police actions have led to the deaths of black people (by shooting e.g. Michael Brown in 2014, Breonna Taylor in 2020; or by the way in which they were restrained while being taken into custody e.g. Eric Garner in 2014, George Floyd in 2020), and the courts' exoneration of police officers in many of these cases provides evidence for the charge of systemic racism. They claim that the police acted in these ways because these citizens were black, and that the offending officers were exonerated because they were white or simply not black.

That explains why BLM's central demand is that the police be defunded. For them, defunding the police is a critical first step in dismantling systemic racism, because they believe that the police are the main instrument of the systemic racism. The claim is that for the police, as an institution, as an arm of the state, black lives don't matter. It's not simply that there are individual police officers who hold and act out of racist beliefs or attitudes, but, in their very practices and philosophy of law enforcement, the police as an institution are racist, or anti-black. This, for them, is the reason why there are so many black people, and especially unarmed black people, who die at the hands of the police.

Some have suggested that "defunding the police" doesn't mean, literally, defunding the police, but reallocating police funding, so that the police can be provided with resources to help them respond more appropriately (in other words, not with force) to crises involving, for example, people with mental illness. BLM itself, however, does not qualify its demand that the police be defunded in any way. A number of U.S. cities actually voted to defund the police or to reallocate police funding, but several of those decisions have been reversed or modified, due to increased violence. 

In Part 2, I hope to raise some critical questions, and offer some assessment of BLM from a Christian perspective.



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¹⁰ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/racism>

Overcoming Racism

in Post-Apartheid South Africa

“Today we have closed the book on apartheid!” Famous words, spoken by president F. W. de Klerk after white voters had backed his political reforms in a historic referendum in March 1992. The outcome of the referendum gave de Klerk the momentum he needed to put South Africa on the road to black majority rule. Two years later, April 1994, democratic elections were held, and Nelson Mandela became the first black president of South Africa.

I was invited to reflect on the changes that took place in South African society and church life, with a specific focus on the issue of racism. It was one thing for de Klerk to say that the book was closed on *apartheid*, but to what extent was the book also closed on *racism*?

When I reflect on these things, my thoughts go back first of all to the 1970s. At that time, I was a high school student in Bellville, a suburb of Cape Town. Just like almost everyone else, I believed that apartheid was a good system, a wise policy that could be biblically defended. In theory it sounded good: *Keep the nations separate and give them equal opportunities for development!* It took me some time to realize that the practice of apartheid did not match the theory.

In 1989, I returned to South Africa as a missionary. While still being part of white society, I developed close ties with Christians in the black townships. My role as a missionary gave me a unique opportunity to understand both the white and the

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Racism was treated
as a weakness that could
be tolerated

.....

black experience. That didn’t make it any easier (the reality was more complex and more diverse than I had expected), but it was a privileged position indeed.

White experience

In the early 1990s, the racial segregation that had been institutionalized during the apartheid years came to an end. What about racism in everyday life? What about racism in the minds and attitudes of people? Just to be clear, I take racism to mean prejudice or antagonism directed against other people because they are of a different race or ethnicity.

I remember going for a haircut in Pretoria in the early 1990s. During the course of our conversation, the barber told me that he served only white clients. I remember him saying: “My

scissors do not touch a black skin" (he said it in Afrikaans: "*my skêr raak nie aan 'n swart kop nie*"). I told him that I was a missionary and that I had good experiences working with black people. To which he replied: "Do not get me wrong. I am not a racist. I am an ethnic realist."

This was obviously a line that he used more often. It represented an attitude that was fairly common among white people: *We don't hate black people but let's be realistic, it just doesn't work to associate with them or be friends with them. We are too different.*

Interestingly, it was common for white families to have an African housemaid who would do the cleaning and the cooking and the babysitting. Over time she would become almost part of the family. Many white families loved their housemaid and took care of her very well, for example by arranging an old age pension for her. And yet, they wouldn't want her to be a member in the same church.

Was South Africa a racist society? I have no desire to demonize white people or white society in general. Some people were racists for sure (there were too many of them), but many people were not. They respected fellow citizens regardless of the colour of their skin.

Weakness

The way this worked itself out in society (and even in church life) was that racism was treated as a weakness that could be tolerated. It was perhaps a sin, but it was a "respectable" sin. You would hear it in the kind of conversations that happened around the *braaivleis* (barbecue). By way of illustration, I remember how a certain brother in the church was described as "a good elder,

you know, a little bit racist." It was a revealing comment. You could be an elder in church even though you were a little bit racist. Could someone be an elder and be a bit of a womanizer or a bit of a drunkard? Of course not. But when someone was a bit of a racist, we were supposed to smile and understand.

The early 1990s were difficult times for white people who had grown up under the apartheid regime. For decades they had been told that Nelson Mandela was a terrorist and that handing power to the ANC would lead to South Africa coming under communist rule. Now, all of a sudden, people had to get used to the idea that the ANC was perhaps not that bad and that we could do business with them. I remember the surprise of watching the first interview with Thabo Mbeki (Mandela's right-hand man) on South African TV. He was a gentleman, well-educated, well-spoken, a man who seemed reasonable, even likeable.

What was the effect on church life? People realized that there were going to be changes. As a missionary, I had connections on both sides which put me in a position to arrange opportunities for white and black Christians to meet. Brothers and sisters from Pretoria started to come along on Sunday mornings to attend worship in the mission church in the black township. We started to arrange combined conferences for youth, for women, and for office-bearers. In general, these initiatives went fairly well.

There were exceptions. I remember one Sunday afternoon I arranged for a group of young people from the mission church in Soshanguve to attend the worship service of the church in Pretoria. I thought it would be good for them to experience an afternoon service in the white church. I consulted with the minister ahead of time and there was no objection. We were welcomed warmly and ushered in. However, this did not go over



well with a few members of the congregation. One man walked out with his family and withdrew his membership the same day.

Overall, however, there was a willingness to adapt. Five years later we had a young brother from the mission church living with us in Pretoria. He came along to the white church on a Sunday when the Lord's Supper was celebrated. He was welcomed without any problem. I vividly remember the sight of this young man seated at the Lord's Table, the only black person in a sea of white, receiving the bread and wine and passing it on to the person next to him. It was a historic moment for a church that had never had a black person at the Lord's Table, and yet the interesting thing was that everybody behaved as if it was perfectly normal to have him there.

Black experience

How was it for black people in South Africa to live through the aftermath of apartheid? Many of them had experienced or witnessed forms of injustice under the apartheid system, black Christians included.

I remember a story I heard from an African brother who worked at the Post Office. Back in the 1960s he had followed a training program, together with some colleagues. He did the whole course and was supposed to write the final exam at an address in downtown Pretoria. However, when he arrived there, he was not allowed into the building because access was reserved for "Whites Only." Since he was not able to write the exam, he failed the course and he missed an opportunity to apply for a better position at the Post Office. It was one injustice after another. And yet, here he was, many years later, an elder in a Reformed church, a Christian who had overcome bitterness, faithfully serving the Lord and his people.


When I think back upon my work as a missionary in Soshanguve, I find it remarkable that the black people were willing to accept me and my colleagues as preachers of the gospel. Given everything they had experienced under apartheid, why would they listen to a white man preaching the gospel if there were plenty of black preachers available?

I'm not able to answer to this question fully but a few things can be mentioned. First, the Lord had already been at work among the black people in South Africa. The first missionaries (Lutherans and others) came to these regions 150 years ago. In other words, much preparatory work had been done and there was a hunger for solid preaching. Second, despite the injustices of apartheid, many black people still had positive experiences working with white people who treated them well and showed Christian love. Third, under the Lord's providence, the excitement about the

"new South Africa" gave missionaries like myself a window of opportunity. Fourth, and most importantly, it was the power of the gospel and the work of the Spirit. The combination of Word and Spirit is powerful to break through any kind of resistance. It can also overcome cultural and racial stumbling blocks. Fifth and finally, people who visited our church services often commented that our preaching was different from the preaching in other churches because it was expository: "You are preaching God's Word!" It was an important lesson: If you can demonstrate that it is God's Word that you are preaching (not your own message), people will listen, even across cultural and linguistic barriers.

Christian heritage

South Africa is not a perfect country. It has many problems. But one of the reasons why the transition of power in the 1990s happened fairly peacefully, in my estimation, is that there was a shared Christian heritage that stretched across the racial divide. Many of the first generation of ANC leaders (Mandela and others) had received their early education at Christian schools and colleges. That had a certain effect. Many of the leaders of the apartheid regime (de Klerk and others) came from a Christian background as well, some of them even Reformed. That had a certain effect too. Under God's providence, all these things helped to prevent the kind of violence and bloodshed that many feared might occur.

In conclusion, there is a lot of talk about racism these days. What I have learned through my South African experience is that racism will always be a human problem, just like hatred and greed and lust and other evils. But it is possible to overcome racism if two things happen. First, people need a good understanding of the gospel, to understand that we as human beings are created as image-bearers of God. Therefore, the gospel needs to be preached and taught in all its fullness. Second, people need to be born again and find their primary identity in Christ. If that happens, racism can no longer exist because the Lord gathers for himself one church from all nations: "You are a chosen race . . ." (1 Pet 2:9). May the LORD continue to gather this one chosen race through his Word and Spirit! 



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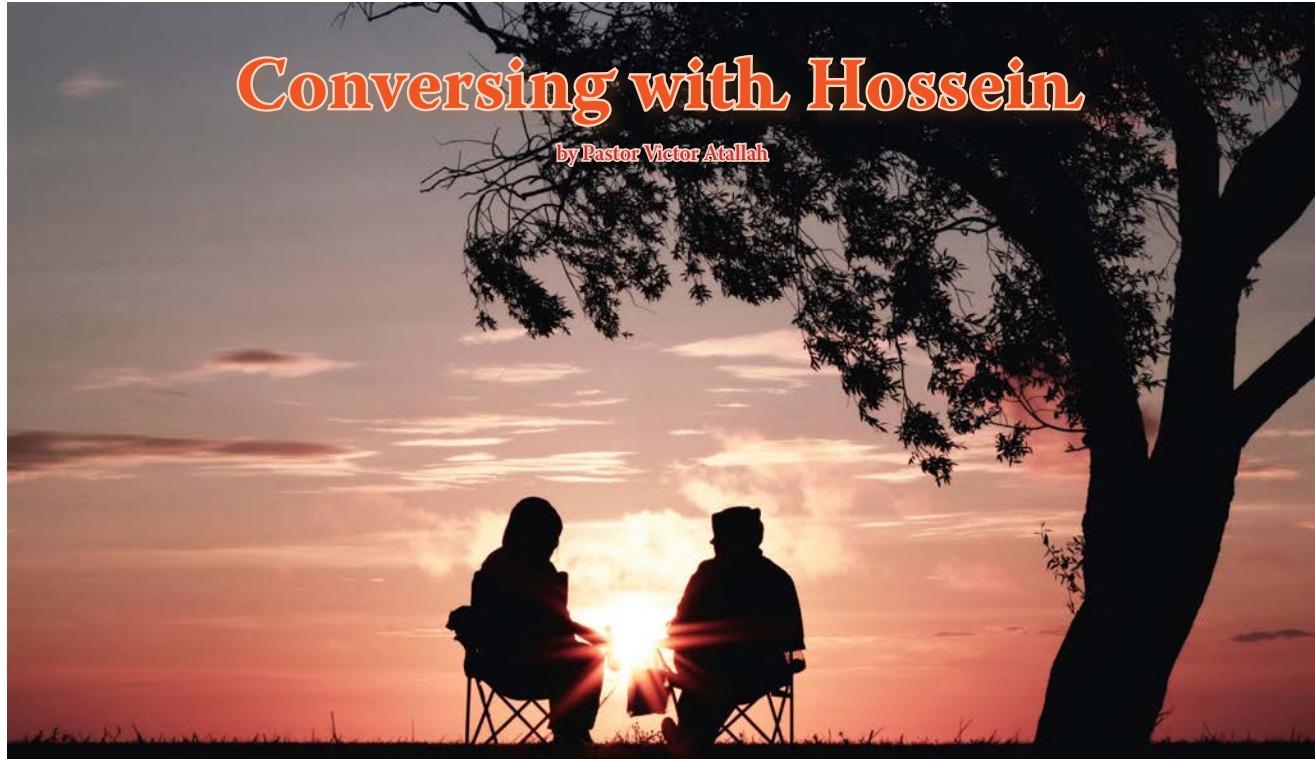
February 2022



Middle East Reformed Fellowship—“Declaring the Whole Counsel of God”

Conversing with Hossein

by Pastor Victor Atallah



By coincidence, I happened upon a man and a woman in a heated argument about parking their cars in a tight spot. They were immediately in front of where I had parked mine. I offered to move my car back a bit so that both would have sufficient room to park. The argument ended and both were happy. The man came to thank me, addressing me as pastor. So, I asked him how he knew that I am a pastor. He replied that he heard a person in the street calling me ‘pastor.’ In the providence of the Lord, this led to a very interesting conversation.

Life Witnesses

I gave him my name. He identified himself as ‘Hossein.’ It is a popular Muslim name. Many are named after the famous grandson of Mohammed. (He is especially revered by Shiite Muslims who annually mark his murder in the year 680 AD by Sunni Muslim competitors in Karbala, southern Iraq. The place is a Shiite shrine.)

So, I realized that he came from a Muslim background, but wrongly thought that he was Arab. I asked him if he spoke Arabic. He answered that he is Iranian and Farsi is his native language, but

he knew some Arabic because he lives in Abu Dhabi where his business is located. He went on to say that he never met an Arab clergyman before and that he likes to work with Christians. I asked him “Why?”

He said that he feels comfortable with Christians and finds it easy to trust them, adding, “At least the ones that I have had business dealings with.”

I asked him if he is a Shiite Muslim. He said that his family is and that he respects all religions, but he himself is not religious at all. He added that he respects and loves especially Jesus and Mohammed.

Jesus and Mohammed

So, I asked him what he likes about Jesus. He said that Jesus’ message is clearly about love and peace. He went on to say that he heard about the virgin birth and the miracles, but these were supernatural religious ideas that he never studied. Yet, he had no doubt whatsoever that Jesus and his life and teaching must be admired by all people.

Then, I asked him what he liked about Mohammed. He remained silent with a faraway look for a few moments and then said, “Mohammed was a very strong and effective leader.”

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From MERF's Farsi ministry website

I asked him if Jesus killed anyone. He quickly answered, "I am sure he never hurt anyone. He even taught people to love their enemies."

I asked the same about Mohammed. He replied, "That is a very different story." He added that Mohammed was a man of his day, who lived an Arab tribal context, where there was a lot of killing.

I pointed out, "but there was a lot of killing in Jesus' time too." and added "Islam teaches that Mohammed came as a superior proph-

et to all the prophets who preceded him."

To my surprise, he answered, "I cannot understand why anybody would believe that he is superior to Jesus."

Following his lead, I said, "If Mohammed had been superior to Jesus, his teaching and life would have been better than Jesus."

He agreed and went on to say that his father always told them that Jesus is his favorite teacher of religion and that Muslims have the wrong idea about Jesus. Then he said, "I want to be frank with you, I have a lot of doubts about all religion but not about the existence of God." He added that many of his friends and some of his relatives have similar doubts and that generally religion is not important to most Iranians.

New Ideas

He was surprised to hear me reply, "But Jesus did

not come to establish a religion."

"What about Christianity?" he asked, and added that it is largest and richest religion in the world.

I said, "Yes, it is a religion, but a lot of it is not Christian at all."

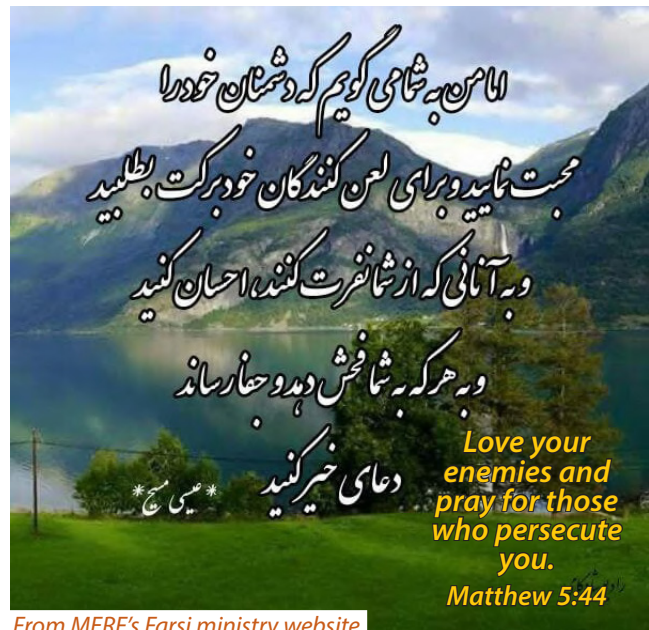
He found this fascinating. I went on to explain why Jesus came and how he is the new Adam, as unlike all people, he was not born sinful. I explained how he died to be our Savior; and that those who believe in and follow Him receive new life and become a new creation.

Hossein said that he never heard about Jesus' death to provide salvation and never heard about the new life. He added that now he is eager to learn more about Jesus and promised to start by reading the

"And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption."

— 1 Corinthians 1:30

gospel of John, as I had recommended. Then I inquired if he could find the Bible in his language online. He said that he will also look for the Bible in English, because he understands English well. Also, he agreed to become friends with one another on WhatsApp. I continue to pray for him and his family, his wife and two teenage daughters.



From MERF's Farsi ministry website

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

A recent editorial raises the complex question of housing prices, driven as they are by supply and demand, regulation, and cultural expectations. The interdependencies of the factors at play give rise to an essentially intractable system and make it impossible to identify any single factor as the cause of rising housing prices.

As Christians, we are called to defend the cause of the poor and the oppressed, the orphan and the widow, and can certainly support government policies that seek well-being and justice for our neighbour, for example by allowing rental suites and additional housing developments. But I wonder whether our first calling is not so much to change the system, as it is to live effectively within it.

Perhaps our expectations need to be reset. It's true that our suburbs with their private yards allow us to live with very little neighbourly contact—and I say this to my own shame—but does this not also quickly rob us of opportunity to get to know our neighbours, to know their needs, their worries, their concerns? For consider if the norm were to rent an apartment: wouldn't that provide unique opportunities to build connections with our community, to be a witness and support, if not in the elevator lobby then at the neighbourhood playground? It could even lead to a renewed feeling of dependence upon one another and upon Christ, which our own immigrant fathers so acutely knew.

Thus, rather than seeing home ownership and upward social mobility as a God-given right, we do well to be content whatever our circumstance, and to focus our energies on the opportunities that God places before us.

Philip DeBoer

Letters to the editor are most welcome (letters@clarionmagazine.ca)! Whether it's to agree or disagree, to offer an alternative, present a new idea, or simply give a few reflections on an article, we invite you to join the discussion. Please note that letters must be under 300 words and written in a Christian manner. See clarionmagazine.ca for complete details.

