
FIRST THINGS

HOW ONE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL ADDRESSED CRITICAL THEORY

by
Bradley G. Green

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More than twenty years ago, my wife and I helped found Augustine School, a classical Christian school in Jackson, Tennessee. Every Christian institution, if it is to remain faithful, must understand the times (1 Chron. 12:32) and articulate the gospel as perplexing ethical challenges emerge. The following statement is one model for how a Christian school can do this. In March, I helped our board of trustees draft “The Augustine School Statement on Social Theory” to help us navigate some of the harmful ideologies and social theories of our day. We adopted the statement as part of our school standards, and affirmation of the statement is a condition of employment and board membership.

–Bradley G. Green

THE AUGUSTINE SCHOOL STATEMENT ON SOCIAL THEORY

Christians of every generation must attempt to understand the faith they profess, to understand the entailments of that faith, and to apply that faith in ever-changing times. There is both an *irenic* aspect to Christianity (Christianity seeks to live at peace with others) and a *polemical* aspect to Christianity (Christianity has always seen the need to draw boundaries when necessary). This statement is meant to be a theologically sound, biblically faithful, and culturally engaged statement which attempts to address a plethora of interrelated challenges of our own day.

Article I

WE AFFIRM that all persons are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26ff.), and descend from a historical Adam, and thus there is a fundamental unity across the human race.

WE DENY that any racial or ethnic category can nullify or negate this fundamental unity of all persons as created in the image of God, since all persons descend from a historical Adam. We further deny that one's racial or ethnic make-up is at the heart of one's identity, especially in comparison to: (1) being created in the image of God (in the case of each person), and (2) being united to Christ by faith alone apart from works (as applicable to believers in Christ). For those who are in Christ, the most pressing and central aspect of one's identity is to be found in being "in Christ," not in one's race or ethnicity (Romans 12:5; 1 Corinthians 1:30; 15:22; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 2:16; Galatians 3:26; 5:6; Ephesians 1:3; 2:6; 3:6).

Article II

WE AFFIRM that all persons who follow Adam (excepting the Lord Jesus) have indeed fallen in Adam, their representative head, and enter into the world guilty, corrupt, and with a proclivity to sin.

WE DENY that any group of persons is more or less virtuous, more or less special, or more or less worthy on the basis of the categories of race or ethnicity, or on the basis of tribe, language, people group, or nation.

Article III

WE AFFIRM that after the fall of Adam there was a great animus, hostility, or antithesis established between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15). This antithesis runs through the rest of history. Christ is the true "serpent crusher" who defeated the serpent by his death and resurrection, conquering evil and sin definitively, with the full revelation of his victory still to come at the last day.

WE DENY any worldview, philosophy, or ideology that places the fundamental antithesis somewhere else, such as the tendency in our own day to place an antithesis between "oppressor" and "oppressed," or between different races.

Article IV

WE AFFIRM that the eschatological or final state of God's people consists of persons from every tribe, language, people, and nation (Revelation 5:9; 7:9).

WE DENY that the differences of tribe, language, people, and nation constitute differences which deny a common humanity, and we deny that persons who come to Christ are inferior or superior to another based on differences of tribe, language, people, and nation.

Article V

WE AFFIRM that our Lord Jesus Christ was born into, and lived his entire earthly life in, a society in which animosity between groups (e.g., Jews and Samaritans, men and women) was a reality, with consequent inequalities between groups in various contexts of life. As a Jewish man living in a society that was shaped primarily by the influence of Jewish men, Jesus experienced what many today would call privileges of his social standing.

WE DENY, along with the universal testimony of Christian orthodoxy, that personal sin or guilt can be rightly attributed to our Lord Jesus Christ, and this would include any personal sin or guilt that is supposedly attached to the inheritance of social privilege. Consequently, we deny that guilt should be imputed solely on the basis of social privilege to any person, for such an imputation implicates our Lord in sin and consequently unravels the whole fabric of the gospel.

Article VI

WE AFFIRM that all persons who are in Christ, and who have expressed faith in Christ, are part of the world-wide body of persons rightly called Christians, and that such persons have a common Father (God the Father), are united to the same Son (God the Son), and are being sanctified by the same Holy Spirit (God the Holy Spirit).

WE DENY that differences of tribe, language, people, and nation are more important or significant than (1) the common humanity all persons share, and (2) the common spiritual relationship that all Christians share by being united to Christ by faith alone.

Article VII

WE AFFIRM that all persons who have come into the world (excepting the Lord Jesus Christ) come into the world guilty, corrupted, and with a proclivity toward sin.

WE DENY that any sin, including the sin of racism (defined as actual animus toward someone solely on the basis of that person's race), can be attributed to a person simply because of that person's racial or ethnic identity. We further deny that the sin of racism is by definition or in fact unique to one, or more than one, race, or that any given race is incapable of committing the sin of racism.

Article VIII

WE AFFIRM that sin is a devastating reality that pervades every human heart, and in various ways affects every aspect of human life.

WE DENY that persons or the systems they create are sinful *by necessity* or *inherently*. This is because man *as created* is not sinful. Man *as fallen* is sinful. While there is a universality to sin, and a tragic tenacity to sin, we deny that sin—including racism—is *by definition* or *by necessity* a part of every relation, system, or structure.

Article IX

WE AFFIRM that when someone has sinned, he or she should repent before the Lord and seek forgiveness from the offended party when and if applicable.

WE DENY that the biblical pattern, especially in the New Covenant, teaches that persons living in the present era can be held morally or spiritually culpable for sins committed by other persons, especially persons living in a different era altogether, with the exception of the unique federal headship of Adam over the whole human race. The clear biblical pattern is that the one who sins is the one who dies (Jeremiah 31:30; Ezekiel 18:1-4, 19-20), and that especially as one moves across the canon of Scripture into the New Covenant, persons are culpable for their own sin (note: this should not be interpreted as a denial of original sin, which passes on to all persons after the sin of Adam—excepting the Lord Jesus Christ). We further deny that any person of any race or ethnic group is more or less sinful simply by being a part of this or that race or ethnic group.

Article X

WE AFFIRM that central to the Christian faith is the glorious truth that when one confesses sin to the Lord, God is faithful and just to forgive such sin and cleanse the sinner from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).

WE DENY that when sin has been confessed, and God has forgiven the sinner, that such sin should be repeatedly confessed or that the sinner needs to seek forgiveness at an additional time or at additional times. To encourage repeated confession of sin after the sinner has been forgiven of said sin is in fact a denial of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, for to encourage repeated confession of sin after the sinner has been forgiven is to deny that the cross of Christ provides the necessary grounds for the forgiveness of sins.

Article XI

WE AFFIRM that individuals are created and important, and that individuals play an essential role in God's world and in God's economy. There is a proper "biblical individualism" which values the importance of the individual. Each person lives his or her life *coram Deo* ("before God").

WE DENY that any individual's ostensible "lived experience" must by definition be granted complete legitimacy or inviolability. We further deny that one's ostensible "lived experience" must be seen as trumping true and real authority—especially the authority of God's Word.

Article XII

WE AFFIRM that Holy Scripture does indeed teach a "social theory," what we might call a "Biblical or Christian Social Theory." As a Christ-centered school, we are eager for our students to wrestle with the Scripture, and to realize that Scripture says much about social theory—about the nature of reality, of the centrality of the family, of the importance and propriety of marriage as an institution between one man and one woman, of the importance—though not ultimacy—of civil government. Rather than *deny* that the Bible and Christianity have something to say about social realities and social theory, we are eager for our students to develop a truly biblical and Christian social theory.

WE DENY that Holy Scripture is neutral with respect to ultimate questions of social theory. We deny that the Scripture is silent on questions of the family, of marriage, and of civil government. We deny that what is called today “Social Justice” or “Critical Theory” or “Critical Race Theory” or “wokeness” or “Antiracism” is compatible with a biblical and Christian notion of social theory.

Article XIII

WE AFFIRM that the Bible calls all Christians to seek justice, and that Christians should be eager and zealous for true biblical justice. Christians must understand and grasp what true justice really is in biblical terms. Ultimately, God Himself—as a just God—is the true and ultimate standard of justice. There are only two moments of perfect justice in the world: (1) the atoning death of Christ and (2) the final judgment. We recognize that human attempts at justice in this life are partial, non-absolute, non-ultimate, and approximate.

WE DENY that Christians are called to usher in absolute and perfect justice in the here and now. While justice—as defined by Scripture and in accord with the God of Scripture—ought to be sought, we deny that humans can fully bring absolute justice in the here and now.

Article XIV

WE AFFIRM that the Western intellectual tradition is worthy of study and attention. We affirm that there is much good in the Western intellectual tradition, even though it also contains its own share of sin and wickedness, including the skeptical tradition in Western philosophy, social and private sins, and much more. Nonetheless, to be educated is to be grounded in one’s own intellectual tradition, and for those of us in the United States (and the Western world more generally), this entails a close and intensive study of the documents, persons, and events of Western history.

WE DENY that the Western intellectual tradition in general, and in particular the history of the United States, can be simply summarized as the history of racism. Every culture manifests its own ultimate commitments, and these commitments are always ultimately religious or theological at their core.

Article XV

WE AFFIRM that racism exists in the Western heritage, whether in the wicked institutions of the African slave trade, Jim Crow laws requiring racial segregation in the South, or in various anti-black laws in the North. We are thankful that the United States has made valiant efforts to affirm the human dignity of all persons, and that the United States has affirmed a proper legal equality before the law of all persons regardless of race.

WE DENY that racism can be presupposed as a pervasive condition of all white people living in the Western world today, irrespective of personal attitudes or actions. Rather, all charges of the sin of racism must be established by evidence that clearly demonstrates a heart of racial animosity or the personal affirmation of racial superiority. Where this evidence is lacking, charges of racism are unjust, uncharitable, anti-gospel, and destructive to the unity of the Church and the cohesion of society. We further deny that only those who hold power in a society (however that may be defined) are capable of the sin of racism.

Article XVI

WE AFFIRM that education should be committed to the search for, understanding of, explication of, and commitment to truth. We also affirm that truth is worthy of study, and that logic is grounded in the reality of God Himself. It is especially appropriate for Christians to seek, and believe in, and seek to explicate the truth, since Jesus Christ could call himself “the truth” (John 14:6), and since the Apostle John could identify the eternal Son as the “Word” (Greek, “Logos”) (John 1:1-14).

WE DENY that the search for truth is inherently a racist reality, or is somehow bound up with, or committed to, white supremacy. Likewise, we deny that logic is somehow bound up with, or committed to, racism or white supremacy.

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