

Greenway defends seminary presidents' statement

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Rejection of critical race theory does not mean denial of systemic racism, and those who make that assumption are “bearing false witness,” the president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary wrote.



(Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary Photo)

Adam Greenway posted an [open letter](#) to “the Southwestern Seminary and Scarborough College Family” on the seminary’s website Dec. 22.

In it, he defended [the statement](#) by six Southern Baptist seminary presidents that declared critical race theory and intersectionality incompatible with the Baptist Faith & Message.

“While other voices of support for the [Council of Seminary President] statement have made their views known, greater attention has been given—especially on social media (where the sardonic and snarky seem to rule the day)—to critics who, among other things, asserted that we were reaffirming our commitment to whiteness, assumed that we are propagating fear to maintain control, announced that we are complicit

with evil, and ascribed to us the pejorative label of theological architects of American slavery,” Greenway wrote.

“And this is just a mere sampling of the complaint, criticism and condemnation that has come our way, both publicly and privately.”

Greenway explains why he wrote the open letter

While criticism might be expected from outsiders who do not share Southern Baptists’ “convictional commitments,” Greenway wrote, he felt the need to address the issue after reading an [opinion article by Ralph West](#), founding pastor of The Church Without Walls in Houston.



Ralph D. West, founder and pastor of The Church Without Walls in Houston

In the Dec. 16 article, West publicly announced he intended to withdraw from the doctoral program at Southwestern Seminary and disassociate from the Southern Baptist Convention. West also called on the six seminary presidents to “repent.”

“I only learned about my fellow Southwesterner’s plans the same time the rest of the world did: when the *Baptist Standard* published it. But once I read it, I immediately called him, and two brothers in Christ had a

wonderful time of conversation sharing hearts and minds with one another in candor and charity,” Greenway wrote.

Greenway noted West’s article continued to circulate and was carried by numerous religious and secular news outlets.

“Regrettably, Pastor West has even been defamed as a ‘Marxist’ by some self-appointed defenders and definers of conservative Baptist orthodoxy,” he wrote.

A second reason Greenway said he wrote the open letter was an email he received from an African American student at Southwestern Seminary who questioned whether he is welcome at the seminary.

“My heart broke over the fact that this student would even contemplate that he should leave our seminary, but I also realized there are likely other African American and other ethnic minority students at Southwestern Seminary and Scarborough College who may be having similar internal deliberations but who haven’t sent me their emails,” Greenway wrote.

Not about ‘feelings and sentiments’

He insisted the statement by the seminary presidents had been misunderstood and “treated by some like a Rorschach test, where ultimate meaning is determined by the subjective experience of the recipient, not by the objective exposition of the statement.”

Much of the criticism has centered on how the seminary presidents’ statement made readers feel, he wrote.

“Feelings and sentiments are undeniably visceral, but not unimpeachably veridical,” Greenway wrote.

The seminary presidents’ statement “not only did not deny systemic racism,

but reaffirmed denominational condemnations of it,” he insisted.

“I want to make this point as charitably but honestly as I can: misconstruing the (Council of Seminary Presidents) statement’s rejection of (critical race theory and intersectionality) as being synonymous with or code for the SBC seminary presidents denying systemic racism is bearing false witness,” Greenway wrote.

“One of my colleagues has even written specifically about how Christians should affirm the reality of systemic racism. Furthermore, when feelings become all-consuming and paramount in determining courses of action irrespective of the facts contained in plain language, we commit the fallacy of eisegesis, or reading into texts meanings we feel or interpretations we want to impose.”

Experiences don’t determine incompatibility to BF&M

Greenway also took issue with those who criticized the “optics” of six white males making a statement about critical race theory. The life experiences of the seminary presidents has no direct relationship to whether critical race theory is incompatible to the Baptist Faith & Message, he asserted.



Adam Greenway, president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. (Photo / Eric Black)

“The reason is straightforward enough: human experience neither determines nor falsifies biblical and theological truth. The Scriptures are the spectacles through which our own experiences must be evaluated, not the other way around,” Greenway wrote.

Rather than being “a value-neutral collection of the insight about the individual and collective experiences of African Americans and other ethnic minorities,” critical race theory is “a comprehensive ideology that makes transcendent truth claims about creation, humanity and the social order that stand in diametric opposition” to the Baptist Faith & Message, he insisted.

The seminary presidents’ statement did not suggest critical race theory and intersectionality have nothing to contribute, Greenway added. He compared critical race theory’s decrying of racism to Islam’s adherence to monotheism and Mormonism’s emphasis on family—an element of truth in the midst of an otherwise false belief system.

Greenway noted he looks forward to the “time of dialogue and fellowship” when the seminary presidents meet with leaders of the National African American Fellowship of the SBC next month.

“It is entirely appropriate for Southern Baptists of various perspectives to deliberate matters of importance to our convention of churches and the broader cultural context in which we find ourselves presently situated. And that debate can—and perhaps must—be vigorous at times,” Greenway wrote.

“What it should never be allowed to descend into, however, is a disputation laden with inaccurate claims and irresponsible language, both of which take us further from settled conviction and enduring consensus during a time when our world needs the gospel message now more than ever.”

Greenway ended his open letter by affirming both his grief for African

Americans who have experienced injustice and his commitment to a “high view of Scripture” and “confessional fidelity” alongside the Great Commission and cooperation as the core components of Southwestern Seminary’s “big tent vision. He insisted “these two positions are not mutually exclusive and contradictory.”