

Commentary: Where I stand on the statement by SBC seminary presidents

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“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.” (Luke 4:18-19)

I think we would all agree this Scripture is a summation of the work and mission of Jesus Christ. Jesus preached good news to the impoverished, the economically maligned. Jesus proclaimed freedom to those held captive. Jesus declared the blind would see, the oppressed would be released. He declared God’s favor had entered into human history. As Jesus’ witnesses, we share his burden.

I say “we,” but there are some concerns about whether or not [the recent statement](#) by the presidents of the six Southern Baptist seminaries hinders them from sharing in this burden.

To be sure, I do not offer a full-throated affirmation of all of the tenets of critical race theory and conceptions of intersectionality. I am fully aware these are secular theories, rooted in notions that suggest solutions are wholly secular. I know Christ is the answer to the world and all of its ills. Of this, I have no doubt.

But I take issue with the assertion such theories are “incompatible” with the gospel. As their brother in Christ, as an African American Christian, as a pastor in the Lord’s church, I stand against this assessment, and I strongly disagree with the seminary presidents.

Inconsistency

I am uncertain as to why these men found it necessary even to associate their affirmation of the 2000 Baptist Faith and Message with a rejection of critical race theory. One would expect, with their sincere rejection of racism, they would speak to instances of it in our culture. They would stand against our president's attempts to maintain the names of Confederate generals on monuments and military bases.

One would expect they would stand against the rise of anti-Semitism and racism seen in groups like the Proud Boys. They would stand against police violence against Black bodies and stand in solidarity with the Black community. They would call the names of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and Ahmaud Arbery. But they have not done that.

Their stand against racism rings hollow when in their next breath they reject theories that have been helpful in framing the problem of racism.

Are these systems spiritual and on par with the biblical text? Absolutely not. But can one secular theory helpful in human flourishing be named that is not also equally lacking? One could look at economic theories, social theories, etc. Enlightenment conceptions have been upheld, despite having no root in the Bible, because they still offer us some value.

Hesitancy

And yet, in this time, these men chose to castigate a framework that points out a truth that cannot be denied. American history has been tainted with racism. America codified it. And more, our public and private institutions propagated it.

Even in a time when laws were passed in this country to overturn the legalization of racism, America truly did not atone for it. No steps were

taken, not in the 1870s nor the 1970s, to say to Black people America was sorry. No recompense was given to the formerly enslaved, their immediate descendants, or to the victims of Jim Crowism. No apologies, no recognition of harm, *nothing*.

It was not until the 1990s that the SBC apologized for the wrong done. The House of Representatives did so in 2008.

In all this time, do you believe, with this rampant resistance to repentance, that somehow things automatically were better? Yes, voting rights were given and Civil Rights were established. Yes, redlining was disrupted. Social moods shifted slightly. But repentance still was lacking. There still was a lack of acknowledgment of the harms done.

As Christian ministers and theologians, these six men are aware that when there is no repentance—especially for such a long time—worse things can happen (Matthew 12:43-45). The Bible requires wrongs to be righted.

No real, sustained and meaningful attempt to right the wrongs of the past ever has been made in this country with God's Black children. So, when social theorists find in this country a racist undercurrent, they do not see it for nothing.

As Christians, we know what they do not, that sin has been reigning and has obfuscated our vision to obey the second great commandment. We cannot love our neighbors as ourselves because we, like the lawyer, are asking smugly, "Who is my neighbor?" In this country, for many years, Black people have not been neighbors. Therefore, love, respect and acceptance have not been necessary.

Equality

As it pertains to the gospel, we believe Christ has died for our sins, was

buried and was bodily raised on the third day. He lives forevermore. Thus, he reigns over all things in heaven and on earth. He now sits at the right hand of God. He will come back to judge the living and the dead in righteousness (Acts 17:31). And only through him can one attain unto eternal life.

How is this truth at all diminished by anything claimed in critical race theory or intersectionality?

Theorists within both frameworks, we can be assured, deny various aspects of the truth of the gospel, but so did Thomas Jefferson. He was an Epicurean. And yet, SBC seminary presidents all boldly proclaim “all men are created equal.” They say it because it is true; it aligns with the fact that Jesus as Lord reigns over a creation made in the image of God.

But you cannot, at the same time, condemn systems of thought like critical race theory and intersectionality for enlightening us to the realities of wrongs done to tarnish the *imago Dei*.

If Jesus reigns in righteousness and Jefferson, though a denier of the faith, made statements in agreement with that righteousness, then we are justified to repeat him. Jefferson’s claims were in response to injustices done to the colonists in the context of an imperial framework.

What difference is there in pointing out the flaws of the American system that have for most of its existence and most of the 20th century justified injustice towards people of color?

Determinacy

My dear brothers’ bias is apparent to all of us. Instead of reaching out to fellow brothers and sisters who have lived with the reality of racism in formulating their view, these six men took it upon themselves to dictate

how we should think about racism.

Saying they condemn all racism makes them, in effect, no different than the Supreme Court that ruled in [Plessy v. Ferguson](#) that all are equal while still being separate. You cannot claim to uphold equality without attacking the very systems undermining it. The Supreme Court also thought they believed in fairness and justice.

A general condemnation of racism is insufficient in a time when there are specific instances of it that go unaddressed. These men have covered their eyes and ears from seeing the faces and hearing the voices of those who know the truth of it. And thus, these men have given away their authority to speak on these matters.

I am their colleague and a member of the Southern Baptist family. While spending many years in affiliation with and in service of Baylor University, I still have maintained a strong connection to the SBC. I even recently returned to Southwestern to pursue a Ph.D. because of my desire to see Southwestern expand and return to its former state.

When I came back “home” to Southwestern, I even encouraged other ministers to do the same. I took President Adam Greenway’s invitation to return as a statement of good faith, that the seminary wanted to welcome me and many other Black ministers to contribute to its legacy.

The statement on critical race theory and intersectionality has soiled that good faith. I cannot maintain my affiliation any longer and therefore am withdrawing from Southwestern Seminary. Nor will I associate with the SBC any longer.

In the future, my primary seminary affiliation will be with Baylor University’s George W. Truett Theological Seminary. There, I have been an affiliated faculty member since 2008.

Truett Seminary courageously continues to diversify. Truett boldly engages with the crucial issues concerning students and faculty of color in their community. This is what the body of Christ needs right now.

What the SBC seminary presidents have done has brought division and confusion to the body of Christ. They must repent and seek reconciliation with those who can properly inform them of the wrong they have done. They must ask the Lord to open their hearts to hear the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ and how Jesus' reign truly should impact our society.

Rev. Dr. Ralph D. West is the founder and pastor of The Church Without Walls in Houston. The views expressed are those solely of the author.