



The D. James Kennedy

CENTER *for* CHRISTIAN
STATESMANSHIP

RACE AND JUSTICE

INFO@STATESMAN.ORG • STATESMAN.ORG
504 C STREET NE #3, WASHINGTON, D.C. 20002

RACE AND JUSTICE

A CENTER FOR CHRISTIAN STATESMANSHIP BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW SERIES

In a May 2023 speech to graduates from a historically black college, President Joe Biden said that “[white supremacy](#)” is “the single most dangerous terrorist threat” to America. But Biden assured students that he hoped to see a future of “fearless progress toward justice,” where the “*strength* of [America’s] diversity” is “the center of American life.” Though President Biden is far from being the only person to hold this view in American political discourse, it reflects a peculiar neo-pagan impulse. If one views *race* as the “strength” of a society, and “strength” is presumably a kind of moral good, then *race/strength/power* is to be assumed the fundamental building block of a society’s ethics. In other words, following President Biden’s remarks on the topic, race is to justice what power (or strength) is to moral goodness: the heart of ethics. Of course, Scripture speaks to ethics and this view is antithetical to the Word of God.

For many millennia, most human societies organized themselves around an ancient tribal principle: an [ethnos](#), the root of the English word “ethnicity.” Etymologically, the Greek term “ethno” meant a “people, nation, class, caste, tribe,” language that scripture also uses. [Many passages](#) of the New Testament use the phrase *panta ta ethne*, meaning “all the nations.” For instance, when Christ told His apostles in [Matthew 28:19](#) to “[g]o therefore and make disciples of all nations,” scripture recorded Christ’s command with the language “panta ta ethne.” Christ is not endorsing ethnocentrism. Rather, he is reversing the old order familiar to Israelites in the days of the prophets confronting a pagan world. [Biblical scholar Dr. Michael Heiser](#) explains that view through the concept of “cosmic geography” as follows:

Israel, as Yahweh’s inheritance, was holy ground. Similarly, the territory of other nations, according to Yahweh’s decree, belonged to other [false] gods [sic]. But in the course of Old Testament history, Israel had become enslaved to the Egyptians and required supernatural deliverance from Egypt and its gods. To subsequently inherit the promised land – now occupied by nations who worshiped other gods – Israel would have to reclaim its landed inheritance by holy war. Thus, once in the land, Israelites still believed that their land belonged exclusively to Yahweh and was His sacred domain: other nations, even if they were in Israel, were under the dominion of evil, lesser gods.

But this radical reversion of the old order wasn’t readily accepted in Europe; it was an affront to ethnic [kinship](#), familial bonds. As one scholar [puts it](#), “This family connection extended not only horizontally, between citizens of the [Greco-Roman] polis; it also extended vertically, between heaven and earth. Greek and Roman gods were known to have taken human sexual partners, from whose progeny whole human populations might descend. Sometimes the fruit of these unions might be the founder of a city.” Even in an ethnically diverse and expansive Roman Empire, there was an ethnic hierarchy. The Romans subdued all other lands and peoples within their borders; their pantheon head [“Jupiter”] was supreme to all other gods. Yahweh, though He was and is the Most High God, was no exception.

[In claiming authority over all the Earth](#), Jesus made all who believe in Him part of His body. In the words of Paul in the letter to the [Galatians](#): “There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.” The Kingdom of Heaven



RACE AND JUSTICE

A CENTER FOR CHRISTIAN STATESMANSHIP BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW SERIES

is the literal, Supreme political entity over the Earth. No longer do demonic powers have a possession right to any lands on the Earth. They merely hold a license to the cosmic geography of the past so that God may liberate us just as He liberated the Israelites from Egypt—to demonstrate His Supreme authority.

Though many ancient peoples identified themselves based on their tribal *ethnos*, ethnic identity was not based on “race,” a word that categorizes individuals based on skin color. Rather, the early English use of the term “ethnicity” was cultural and religious. [Dictionary.com](#) summarizes this etymology as follows: “The earliest use of ethnic in English ... was as a noun for a ‘heathen’ or ‘pagan.’ At that time, ethnic was also used colloquially to refer to those who originated from nations that weren’t Christian or Jewish. It wasn’t until the early 1900s that ethnicity was used to refer to social groups of a common ancestry and shared culture.”

By contrast, “race” is a relatively novel method of identification in the historical record, but was nevertheless conflated with “ethnicity” by some of America’s most liberal founding fathers. In a 1755 essay titled “[Observations Concerning the Increasing of Mankind, Peopling of Countries](#),” Benjamin Franklin defined the category of “white people” as only those of Anglo-Saxon ethnic heritage, excluding Spaniards, Italians, French, Russians, and Germans because, in his view, they possessed a “swarthy complexion.” Franklin wrote as follows: “[T]he Saxons only excepted, who with the English, make the principal Body of White People on the Face of the Earth. I could wish their Numbers were increased. And while we are, as I may call it, Scouring our Planet, by clearing America of Woods, and so making this Side of our Globe reflect a brighter Light to the Eyes of Inhabitants in Mars or Venus, why should we in the Sight of Superior Beings, darken its People? ... But perhaps I am partial to the complexion of my Country, for such Kind of Partiality is natural to Mankind.”

Thomas Jefferson held an even more radical view than Franklin, and was arguably the foundation for eugenics. Not only did Jefferson conflate the classical understanding of ethnicity with race, he argued that race could be the vehicle to understand human anthropology. In his book *Notes on the State of Virginia*, Jefferson writes as follows:

I advance it therefore as a suspicion only, that the blacks, *whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances*, are inferior to the whites in the endowments both of body and mind. It is not against experience to suppose, that different species of the same genus, or varieties of the same species, may possess different qualifications. Will not a lover of natural history then, one who views the gradations in all the races of animals with the eye of philosophy, excuse an effort to keep those in the department of man as distinct as nature has formed them? *This unfortunate difference of colour, and perhaps of faculty, is a powerful obstacle to the emancipation of these people.* Many of their advocates, while they wish to vindicate the liberty of human nature, are anxious also to preserve its dignity and beauty. Some of these, embarrassed by the question 'What further is to be done with them?' join themselves in opposition with those who are actuated by sordid avarice only. Among the Romans emancipation required but one effort. The slave, when made free, might mix with, without staining the blood of his master. But with us a second is necessary, unknown to history. When freed, he is to be removed beyond the reach of mixture.



RACE AND JUSTICE

A CENTER FOR CHRISTIAN STATESMANSHIP BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW SERIES

Today, American Christians would recognize these views as repugnant to biblical teaching, a denial of the *imago dei* and a departure from the objective truth that all men are created equal. However, the mistakes of these great men in American history underscore a truth first penned by [French classical author Francois duc de La Rouchefoucold](#): “Hypocrisy is the homage that vice pays to virtue.” In recognizing certain actions as “sinful” or “wrong,” one recognizes the converse, an objective standard of “righteous” or “right.” Societies that recognize objective, eternal moral goods also recognize sin as substandard, that which falls short of the good.

Racism, hatred for another based on their skin color or the denial of their God-given dignity based on skin color, is the successor sin to the ancient pagan sin of ethnic hatred. In light of this, racism must be understood as “neo-pagan,” a new form of an ancient impulse to arrange human society in a pagan, hierarchical manner in opposition to God’s moral law. But societies that are not guided by objective standards of truth and goodness cannot coherently explain *why* racism and ethnic hatred are sins. Even worse, those societies that reject objective standards of truth and goodness may even embrace a form of ethnocentrism or racism.

Since the 20th century, neo-pagan philosophy has grown to become a powerful “scholarly” opponent to traditional Christian philosophy. A clear example of this is the emergence and development of Critical Race Theory, popularized by Ivy League legal scholar Derrick Bell.

Nowadays, Critical Race Theory [“CRT”] is commonly construed to mean “opposition to cultural or systemic racism.” The Anti-Defamation League, for example, [defines](#) it as a theory which explains how “racism is more than the result of individual bias and prejudice. It is embedded in laws, policies and institutions that uphold and reproduce racial inequalities.” But this definition is underinclusive such that it misleads people about the philosophical essence of CRT.

Before CRT, there was “[Critical Theory](#),”¹ advanced by the legal academy to argue that law was not a set of rules to advance objective principles of the good. Rather, critical theorists posited that law was a device of power; specifically, a tool used by the powerful to organize societal hierarchies that most benefited them. Critical Race Theory was an outgrowth of critical theory, arguing that race was the *raison d’être* for law. Indeed, the [Stanford Encyclopedia for Philosophy](#) describes CRT as “itself influenced by Marxist theories of the state and the law – namely, the aim of debunking the idea that the law and the state are neutral institutions that secure the common good and the rights of all as an ideology masking their character as instruments of racial (and class) oppression.”

Critical Race Theory is observably incoherent. It relies on the premise that the natural law correctly identifies good and evil, justice versus oppression, but argues the natural law is merely a pretext to justify the evil of white supremacy. Because it is a tool of white supremacy, the Critical Race Theorist believes the principles of the natural law must be abandoned to guarantee a desired racial power structure oriented toward “racial equity.”

¹ See “Cultural Marxism: Dangers of a godless society,” CCS Papers, Section E



RACE AND JUSTICE

A CENTER FOR CHRISTIAN STATESMANSHIP BIBLICAL WORLDVIEW SERIES

CRT's goal of "racial equity," however, would seem to contradict its own principles. "[Equity](#)" is a Judeo-Christian western belief that emphasizes the need for fairness when the law is inadequate. Indeed, Saint Thomas Aquinas explains the principles of equity in the [Summa Theologica](#) as follows:

[S]ince human actions, with which laws are concerned, are composed of contingent singulars and are innumerable in their diversity, it was not possible to lay down rules of law that would apply to every single case. Legislators in framing laws attend to what commonly happens: although if the law be applied to certain cases it will frustrate the equality of justice and be injurious to the common good, which the law has in view. Thus the law requires deposits to be restored, because in the majority of cases this is just. Yet it happens sometimes to be injurious – for instance, if a madman were to put his sword in deposit, and demand its delivery while in a state of madness, or if a man were to seek the return of his deposit in order to fight against his country. *On these and like cases it is bad to follow the law, and it is good to set aside the letter of the law and to follow the dictates of justice and the common good. This is the object of "epikeia" which we call equity.* Therefore it is evident that "epikeia" is a virtue.

If CRT were to truly and consistently uproot all Judeo-Christian, Western values from American law, then that must include *the concept of equity itself*. In its place would not be a system guided by principles of fairness as dictated by natural justice. Rather, it would be principles dictated by the will of the stronger, much like the old pagan world.

The Christian believes that natural justice is objectively intertwined with God's perfect, eternal moral law. As such, the Church must advocate for *unqualified* natural justice, that which secures the common good and promotes human flourishing regardless of one's ethnic or racial identity.

