

Marc Roby: We are continuing our break from studying theology to look at some current topics of great importance from a Christian perspective. In our session last week, we began a discussion about how Marxist ideologies have become so prevalent in our culture today. We looked at Angela Davis, a 60's radical who became a professor in the University of California as an example. She spoke about decades of work, by herself and others, coming to fruition in all of the riots we see happening in our country today.

Dr. Spencer, you pointed out that she was a student of Herbert Marcuse, a member of the so-called Frankfurt school, which developed critical theory. I had asked you to tell us what critical theory is, and you began with a digression to talk about the Italian communist Antonio Gramsci. He developed the idea that the bourgeoisie use their cultural narrative – in other words, their history and system of values – as a tool of oppression. Therefore, whenever a worker adopts the so-called hegemonic narrative, he is participating in his own oppression. Are you now ready to define what critical theory is?

Dr. Spencer: Yes. Let me begin, somewhat surprisingly, by quoting the first sentence of the Wikipedia article on critical theory. It says, “Critical theory is a social philosophy pertaining to the reflective assessment and critique of society and culture in order to reveal and challenge power structures.”¹ That is a good short definition. And it makes clear that the theory is Marxist in its origin.

Remember that Marx viewed all of human history in terms of the conflict between oppressors and oppressed. In other words, in terms of a power structure. Marx, of course, was focused on economic systems, but critical theory broadens the scope of his focus on conflict to include any type of human interaction. The different movements spawned by this broadening of Marx's ideas are sometimes referred to as neo-Marxist. And note that the definition says the purpose of critical theory is to “reveal and challenge” these power structures.

Marc Roby: In other words, question authority!

Dr. Spencer: That's it exactly. So, critical theory criticizes, if you will, every authority structure because it views every power structure as inherently oppressive or exploitive. Which immediately puts it at odds with a Christian worldview. The fifth commandment tells us, as we read in Exodus 20:12, “Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.”² And, as we have discussed before³, the Bible tells us that God has given us three realms of delegated authority in this life; the family, the church and the

¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Critical_theory, accessed on 9/11/20

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³ See Sessions 28-33

state. We are not just called to honor our parents, we are also commanded to honor authority in the church and the state.

Marc Roby: And, of course, the classic verse about obeying church leaders is Hebrews 13:17, where we read, “Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.”

Dr. Spencer: And it is important to notice that that verse says those in authority must give an account, which means, of course, an account to God. He is the ultimate source of all authority and anyone in a position of delegated authority will have to answer to God for how they have used it. Authority is supposed to be used for the benefit of those who are under that authority.

Marc Roby: And that biblical view obviously contradicts the idea that all authority is exploitive or oppressive.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, it does. Although, because human beings are sinners, it *is*, in fact, common to see authority abused. But it does not follow that authority is inherently wrong. The problem is sin.

Marc Roby: Alright. And with regard to the civil government, the classic verse is Romans 13:1 where the apostle Paul wrote, “Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.” And the context is clearly here, civil government.

Dr. Spencer: And you can also look, for example, at 1 Peter 2:13-14, where we are commanded, “Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right.”

We have discussed authority in these three realms at length before, so I don’t want to repeat that now. My present point is simply that while there are strict limits imposed on authority, properly administered authority is good. It is ordained by God for the good of those who are under that authority. It is simply unbiblical, and I would add empirically untrue, to say that *all* authority is oppressive or exploitive.

Marc Roby: Yes, that certainly makes sense.

Dr. Spencer: There is one more very important point that I want to make about critical theory before we move on.

Marc Roby: What is that?

Dr. Spencer: If it were true that our cultural narrative is nothing more than a tool of oppression and it can be rationally opposed in its totality, then it would necessarily follow that there is no absolute truth.

Marc Roby: I’m not sure that conclusion is obvious.

Dr. Spencer: No, it isn't obvious at all, you have to think it through. Any cultural narrative is going to contain statements that purport to be factual, in other words, they claim to be *true*. So, for example, the statement that honoring your mother and father is good and will lead to blessing. Or that marriage should be a life-long commitment between one man and one woman.

Now, if these statements are mere cultural norms and there can be other, equally true, cultural norms that contradict these, then there is no absolute truth. Truth would, in that case, just be a cultural convention, which is what both critical theory and postmodernism irrationally believe.

Marc Roby: And, further, God would be a liar, because he says that those statements are true.

Dr. Spencer: Exactly. We again see that this whole Marxist ideological framework is radically opposed to biblical Christianity. There is no such thing as a Christian Marxist. Let me say that again differently to make it absolutely clear, because this is an important point. If you are a Christian, you *must* be opposed to Marxism and all neo-Marxist ideologies because Marxism is opposed to Christianity. You cannot support the enemies of your Lord and Savior. The psalmist declared in Psalm 139:21-22, "Do I not hate those who hate you, O LORD, and abhor those who rise up against you? I have nothing but hatred for them; I count them my enemies."

Marc Roby: Those verses probably need some explaining. I'm sure at least some of our listeners immediately thought to themselves, "Now wait a minute, Jesus Christ told us, in Matthew 5:44, to love our enemies. So how can it be good to hate them?"

Dr. Spencer: Well, that is a great question. And the best answer I've ever seen was given by the great 19th-century English theologian and preacher Charles Spurgeon. In his famous work, *the Treasury of David*, he wrote the following about Verse 21: "To love all men with benevolence is our duty; but to love any wicked man with complacency would be a crime. To hate a man for his own sake, or for any evil done to us, would be wrong; but to hate a man because he is the foe of all goodness and the enemy of all righteousness, is nothing more nor less than an obligation."⁴

Marc Roby: There is a lot packed into that short statement.

Dr. Spencer: I agree, so let me explain it further. We are to want what is best for all men, including our enemies, which of course ultimately means that we are to share the gospel and pray for their salvation; that is to love all men with benevolence. But we cannot love anyone with complacency. If someone has made himself an enemy of God by opposing God and his righteous Word, he is to be our enemy and we are to hate him. Now, to be clear, this is not a hatred that would delight in seeing harm come to him, that would be vengeful sin; we are still to love him with benevolence, meaning that we want to see him saved. But it *is* hatred in the sense that we oppose him with all our might and would see it as perfectly just if *God* chose to destroy him. God tells us in Deuteronomy 32:35, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay. In due time their foot will slip; their day of disaster is near and their doom rushes upon them." These two senses are not

⁴ Charles Spurgeon, *The Treasury of David*, Hendrickson Publishers, 2016, Vol. 3, Part 2, pg. 265

contradictory, so with the proper meaning attached to the terms, we can simultaneously love and hate someone.

Marc Roby: That is a great explanation of how to reconcile the paradox of being commanded both to love our enemies and to hate those who hate and oppose God. And that verse from Deuteronomy is a frightening statement about God's judgment, which we all truly deserve.

Dr. Spencer: That's right. We have all sinned, but, praise God, we can repent, trust in Christ and be saved. But if we have truly done that, then Jesus Christ is our Lord. His enemies are our enemies. We cannot join with them in opposing him, and to join in *any* Marxist or neo-Marxist ideology is to oppose Christ. And critical theory, or perhaps we should say theories because it comes in many flavors, is absolutely and irreconcilably opposed to Christ.

Marc Roby: Now you said last week that Angela Davis is a great example of how these theories have become so common. As a student of Marcuse, she put the idea of the long march through the institutions into practice. She became a professor and then used that position to influence many people.

Dr. Spencer: And it is very instructive to see how it is that these far-left ideologies have taken over the universities in this country. And they absolutely *have* done so, there can be no doubt about that. One recent study found that the ratio of registered democrats to republicans in top universities is greater than eleven to one, and in some fields it is much higher.⁵ That is obviously only one indication of the left-leaning nature of academia, but there are many others.

My own experience as a professor for 25 years certainly bears this out. I was in the college of engineering, which doesn't lean as far to the left as the college of letters and science, but it was still overwhelmingly left. And when I served on campus-wide committees with colleagues from other colleges, I was frequently shocked at how far left almost all of them were. If you held a conservative view on just about anything, you would be well advised to keep it quiet.

Marc Roby: And I thought the far-left prided itself on being tolerant and inclusive.

Dr. Spencer: Ah, but they attach a very different meaning to those terms. Marcuse dealt with this in a way that is instructive of how the far-left abuses language and is often the exact opposite of what they claim to be. According to Roger Kimball, "Marcuse came up with several names for the idea that freedom is a form of tyranny. The most famous was 'repressive tolerance' ... He even offered a simple formula for distinguishing between, on the one hand, the 'repressive tolerance' that expresses itself in such phenomena as freedom of assembly and free speech and, on the other, the 'liberating tolerance' he recommends. 'Liberating tolerance,' he wrote, 'would

⁵ Mitchell Langbert, Anthony J. Quain, and Daniel B. Klein, *Faculty Voter Registration in Economics, History, Journalism, Law, and Psychology*, Econ Journal Watch, Sept. 2016, available at <https://econjwatch.org/articles/faculty-voter-registration-in-economics-history-journalism-communications-law-and-psychology>

mean intolerance against movements from the Right, and toleration of movements from the Left.”⁶

Marc Roby: That is an amazing example of how to pervert language. According to his definition, you can be “tolerant” by only tolerating those views you agree with.

Dr. Spencer: Yes, it is pretty amazing. Kimball goes on to say that “The usual name for this sort of attitude, of course, is intolerance, but no doubt it would be terribly intolerant to insist on such a repressive if elementary point.”⁷

Marc Roby: I like that. We need to point out when people make completely ridiculous statements.

Dr. Spencer: I agree. But now I’d like to give just one example of how the far-left has taken over the university system. It comes from a very eye-opening and downright scary book written in 2006 by David Horowitz, called *The Professors*. In his introduction he talks about visiting the University of Delaware in 2001 and asking a senior member of the history department, who was the *only* conservative in the department, how that imbalance came about. The professor related how he had not been allowed to sit on a search committee since 1985, even though he had been chair of the committee in that year and they had hired a Marxist, which tells you that he didn’t apply any kind of ideological litmus test during the hiring process. But many people on the left are not only willing to apply a litmus test, they think it is their duty. People like Angela Davis.

Marc Roby: In other words, you’re saying they won’t hire even a qualified candidate if the person is conservative?

Dr. Spencer: That’s right. This professor went on to tell Horowitz that in the very same year they were speaking, which was 2001, his department had an opening for someone in Asian history. The best qualified candidate was a man from Stanford, but he didn’t get the job. Wondering why, this professor went and talked to the chair of the search committee, who told him, “Oh, you’re absolutely right. He was far and away the most qualified candidate and we had a terrific interview about his area of expertise. But then we went to lunch and he let out that he was for school vouchers. And that killed it.”⁸

Marc Roby: OK, what in the world does your view of school vouchers have to do with teaching Asian history?

Dr. Spencer: Well, obviously, not a thing in the world. But to a dedicated member of the far-left, it is a sign of someone having a conservative attitude and, therefore, the candidate is unqualified

⁶ Roger Kimball, *The Long March: How the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s Changed America*, Encounter Books, 2000, pg. 170

⁷ Ibid

⁸ David Horowitz, *The Professors: The 101 Most Dangerous Academics in America*, Regnery Publishing, 2006, pp xxxvii-xxxviii

to teach at the university because he won't join in your program of indoctrinating the students into your far-left, Marxist ideologies.

Marc Roby: That's ridiculous.

Dr. Spencer: Quite literally so. But it is also common. That is how faculties came to be nearly 100% far left in the space of one generation. I could give you many examples of how extreme some faculty members are, but one will suffice.

After the terrorist attacks that brought down the World Trade Center towers on September 11, 2001, Ward Churchill, a professor of ethnic studies at the University of Colorado in Boulder, published an essay entitled *Some People Push Back: On the Justice of Roosting Chickens*, in which he said the following about the people who died in the World Trade Center: "If there was a better, more effective, or in fact any other way of visiting some penalty befitting their participation upon the little Eichmanns inhabiting the sterile sanctuary of the twin towers, I'd really be interested in hearing about it."⁹

Marc Roby: That's unbelievable. He actually equated the civilian employees working in the World Trade Center to Adolf Eichmann, one of the Nazi officers in charge of the holocaust?

Dr. Spencer: It is completely irrational, not to mention wicked. And the rest of the essay is just as bad or, possibly, worse. You wonder what world this man inhabits. It certainly isn't the world of reality. He twists and distorts absolutely everything. His comments on World War II make it sound like the United States was the aggressor and that we launched unprovoked attacks on the peace-loving countries of Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan. And yet, I must again point out that his views, while admittedly extreme, are not *that* extreme in academia. If you want to read about a lot of other perhaps slightly less frightening individuals, read Horowitz's book.

Marc Roby: What kinds of comments were made on the UC campus here in Davis after the attacks of 9/11?

Dr. Spencer: I would say the most common view by far in the college of letters and science was to be wringing your hands and thinking, "oh my, we are such bad people, what do we need to do to change so that people won't hate us so much." People literally seemed to think that the attacks were justified.

Marc Roby: That's a little hard to stomach.

Dr. Spencer: But it illustrates how far left the campus environment is from the rest of the country. My own campus, the University of California here in Davis, also has a faculty member, Professor Joshua Clover, who is a professor of English, who has openly advocated the killing of

⁹ <https://cryptome.org/ward-churchill.htm>

police for a number of years. As just one example, in a 2015 interview with SFWeekly magazine, he said, “People think that cops need to be reformed. They need to be killed.”¹⁰

He has been given multiple opportunities to apologize or recant or soften his statements and has doubled down on his repugnant views every time. The university declared that it can’t discipline him because his views are protected by the First Amendment, although the chancellor did say that his views are “offensive and abhorrent”, which is good, but they went no further.¹¹

Marc Roby: That’s very disappointing.

Dr. Spencer: I’ve been disappointed with the University of California many times. They also now have an ideological litmus test that all faculty applicants must pass. They, of course, deny that this is the purpose. But every candidate for a faculty position has to present a “Statement of Contributions to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion” in his package. This simply provides the university with a way of throwing out faculty applicants who don’t agree with its commitment to these far-left neo-Marxist ideologies, independent of how good the person is in his or her field of expertise. And faculty members now have to supply a similar statement every time they go up for a promotion.

Marc Roby: In other words, the university has set a tone that clearly indicates that conformity to its far-left ideologies is more important than excellence in your field.

Dr. Spencer: Well, they would, of course, *very* strongly deny that. But it is hard to conclude otherwise when you look at how the system works. To be fair, these rules are applied differently in different departments and colleges, but even when they are not considered the most important thing, they are still part of constant barrage of left-wing ideas which are presented not as ideas for your consideration, but as statements of fact. For example, it is common to require faculty members on search committees to go through implicit bias training and other similar things that are based on completely false premises. These are not optional.

Marc Roby: And, of course, this kind of indoctrination doesn’t stop with the universities.

Dr. Spencer: No, unfortunately, it does not. In fact, the education departments are among the most radically left of all departments, and they are responsible for training our K-12 teachers and most of the people who work in the education area in government, overseeing the curricula for example. These extreme far-left neo-Marxist ideas have been pushed for well over 30 years. In 1990, Roger Kimball wrote that “It is no secret that the academic study of the humanities in this country is in a state of crisis. Proponents of deconstruction, feminist studies, and other politically

¹⁰ Benjamin Fearnow, *California Republicans Propose Firing UC Davis Professor Over Anti-Police Remarks*, Newsweek, <https://www.newsweek.com/uc-davis-california-professor-kill-police-officers-fired-james-gallagher-free-1370791>

¹¹ <https://www.ucdavis.edu/news/statements-regarding-public-comments-made-by-tenured-member-faculty/>

motivated challenges to the traditional tenets of humanistic study have by now become the dominant voice in the humanities departments of many of our best colleges and universities.”¹²

Marc Roby: And now these views have filtered down into the K-12 system.

Dr. Spencer: Absolutely. A friend of mine who teaches in the public schools and who wants to remain anonymous for obvious reasons, wrote that “What the children are exposed to is sickening. I would not recommend that anyone send their kids to public schools. Even ‘good’ teachers and administrators are often at best small islands in a sea of foolishness, falsehood, and filth.”

Marc Roby: That’s a strong statement. But then again, there have been a number of troubling things in the news lately. For example, three years ago there was a report about kindergartners in our area being taught from a book affirming transgender ideas.¹³

Dr. Spencer: And that is just the tip of the iceberg. The nonsense about students being allowed to use locker rooms and bathrooms that agree with their “gender identity” rather than their biological sex and many other things like that are all completely crazy. But they all stem from the same source, a rejection of our culture. And, ultimately, a rejection of God. As we saw at the beginning of this session, critical theory is anti-authority, which is, ultimately, anti-God.

The real motivating influence and power behind this movement is Satan. As Whittaker Chambers noted, when Satan tempted Eve by saying “you shall be like God”, he created the second oldest religion. It is a religion that is, at its core, anti-God. That is why it opposes the biblical truth that God created man male and female. That is why it opposes the family. That is why it opposes individual responsibility and accountability. That is why it opposes truth, and so on.

Marc Roby: I’m sure there is a lot more for us to discuss, but it will have to wait for next time. For now, let me remind our listeners that they can email their questions and comments to info@whatdoesthewordsay.org. We will do our best to answer you.

¹² Roger Kimball, *Tenured Radicals: How Politics has Corrupted our Higher Education*, Harper & Row Publishers, 1990, pg. xi

¹³ Diana Lambert, ‘*A girl brain but a boy body.*’ *Kindergarten parents outraged over transgender book read in class*, Sacramento Bee, Aug. 25, 2017, available at <https://www.sacbee.com/article169365057.html>