

*Fr. Perozich comments —*

*I was born in the morning, but not this morning. I know when people are pulling the wool over my eyes. Yet I do not always have the answers or techniques to respond.*

*Edward Feser, however, does, and he shares them with the readers in this interview.*

*He addresses racism, immigration, and perversions of all of these that are thrust upon us by bullies in the church, politics, education, NGOs, “science”, medicine, pseudo historians, and others.*

*The Catholic faith is best presented by distinctions. Feser makes these for me.*

*He notes that people engage in cultic behavior and associations to promote their ideologies which are not grounded in Christian faith. Feser destroys the lies that have been promulgated and propagated regarding social issues.*

*If you need some ammo in dealing with thugs and thuggery, this interview is a start. The book, which I have not read, promises more.*

## **The Church’s teachings about racism and the truth about Critical Race Theory**

“People drawn to Critical Race Theory,” says Edward Feser, author of *All One in Christ*, “have a cult-like tendency both to treat CRT as if it were some divine revelation that at last has uncovered the unseen truth about the world, and to dogmatically refuse even to consider any criticism of it.”

[September 8, 2022 Carl E. Olson \](#)  
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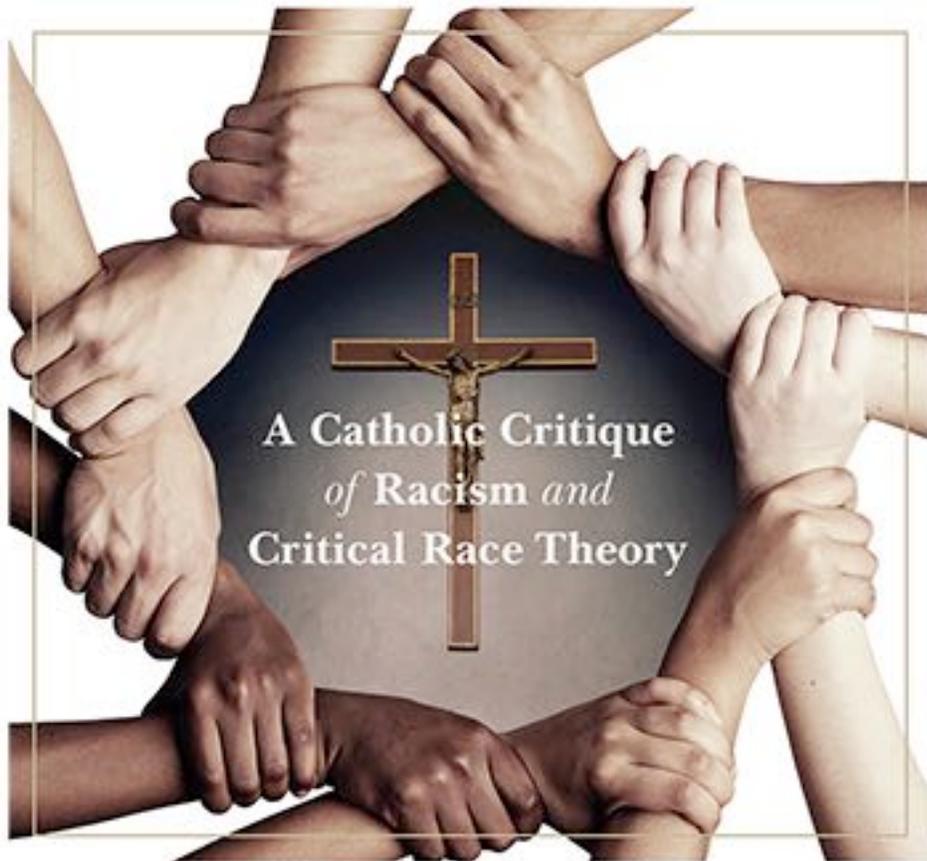
Edward Feser, PhD, is Professor of Philosophy at Pasadena City College in Pasadena, California. Called by National Review “one of the best contemporary writers on philosophy”, he is the author of many books including *Five Proofs of the Existence of God*, *By Man Shall His Blood Be Shed*, *The Last Superstition: A Refutation of the New Atheism*, *Aquinas*, and *Scholastic Metaphysics*.

His most recent book is *All One in Christ: A Catholic Critique of Racism and Critical Race Theory* (Ignatius Press, 2022). Ryan T. Anderson, President of Ethics and Public Policy Center, describes it as “the best book I’ve read on the topic.” And Deacon Harold Burke-Sivers states it is an “absolute must-have for all Catholics who want to be well informed about racism and Critical Race Theory.”

*Dr. Feser recently corresponded with Catholic World Report about his new book, the Church’s teachings about racism, and why Critical Race Theory is not only problematic, but has a deeply cultish and gnostic quality to it.*

Edward Feser

# *All One in Christ*



IGNATIUS

**CWR:** You note, at the beginning of your book, that the Church's teaching against racism has different foundations and focus than the antiracism found in the secular realm. How is it different? And why is it significant?

**Edward Feser:** Secular debates on the subject often focus on questions about purported biological differences between races, whether race is grounded in something real or is instead socially constructed, and so on. But as I show in the book, the Church explicitly teaches that her condemnation of racism is rooted in considerations that go deeper than anything biology could either establish or undermine.

First, it is grounded in the claim of traditional Catholic philosophy and theology that the human intellect and will are immaterial or non-physical powers of the human soul. This soul is specially created by God with each new human being, and cannot arise from purely material biological processes. Its reality is knowable only through philosophical argumentation and divine revelation, rather than through empirical investigation. Now, human dignity and basic human rights are grounded in these powers of the soul, because it is by virtue of these powers that we can come to know and love God. Because all human beings of whatever race have souls, it follows that they all have the same dignity and basic rights.

The second foundation of the Church's condemnation of racism is the theological truth that, just as all human beings have sinned, so too all have been offered redemption through Christ's sacrifice, and the opportunity for the beatific vision. This supernatural end adds to the dignity afforded to us by our nature as rational creatures, and because it has been given to all human beings of whatever race, it follows that all human beings equally have this added dignity.

This is important because, since the basic equality of the races is grounded in these philosophical and theological truths about human nature, it cannot be undermined by the outcome of debates about whether race is socially constructed, biological claims about racial differences, and so on.

**CWR:** It's a common claim that the Church either strongly supported slavery for centuries or at least tacitly turned a blind eye. Any truth to that? What has the Church done and said about slavery over her 2,000 year history?

**Feser:** Nothing could be further from the truth. As I document in the book, the Church has for five centuries, ever since the start of the modern slave

trade, consistently condemned the enslavement of the peoples of the Americas and Africa. A long line of popes in a series of documents thundered against the practice, threatened excommunication against those who persisted in it, and so forth. It is true that many Catholics ignored this teaching, but the teaching was definitely there.

Part of the reason for confusion on this matter is that the word “slavery” has been used in different senses over the centuries. What people usually have in mind when they hear this word today is *chattel* slavery, which involves claiming complete ownership over another human being in the way one might own an animal or an inanimate object. It is the kind of thing we associate with slavery in the American south before the Civil War. The Church has always condemned this practice as inherently evil.

Now, there are other, less extreme but still highly problematic practices that have fallen under the “slavery” label. One of them is called “indentured servitude,” which basically involves a prolonged period of forced service to another person as payment for a debt or the like. Another is called “penal servitude,” which is a matter of forcing someone to labor in punishment for a crime.

Neither of these practices has anything to do with race, and at least in theory neither amounts to chattel slavery. For that reason, the Church traditionally held that such lesser forms of servitude are, at least in theory, not always evil. However, each of them is still very morally hazardous and has a tendency in practice to degenerate into chattel slavery. For such reasons, the common teaching of Catholic theologians has long been that in practice it is morally better never to permit even these lesser forms of servitude.

Those who claim that the Church once condoned slavery ignore these distinctions and this history. Often they have an ax to grind. For example, sometimes they want to badmouth the Church by claiming that she was complicit in evil. Or they want to justify changing certain teachings of the Church, and use the false allegation that the Church changed her teaching on slavery as a pretext for this.

**CWR:** You have a chapter on the rights and duties of nations and immigrants. What are a couple of key points about Church teaching on immigration that are either often ignored or even misrepresented?

**Feser:** People often quote the Catechism, papal speeches, and other Church documents teaching the moral duty of nations to welcome immigrants, especially those fleeing persecution, economic hardship, and the like. They are right to do so because this is an important and longstanding teaching of the Church.

The problem is that they often quote very selectively from the documents in question. They leave out the qualifications that the Church and the popes have always recognized. For example, the Church has explicitly acknowledged that a nation has to take account of the economic circumstances of its own citizens when deciding how many immigrants to take in. She has taught that a nation may also take account of cultural considerations and how best to assimilate immigrants. She has taught that immigrants must obey the law, and that a nation has a right to protect the integrity of its borders and to prevent illegal immigration. I document all of this in the book with many quotations from various Church teaching documents, including statements from popes such as Pope St. John Paul II and Pope Francis.

When all aspects of the Church's teaching on this subject are taken into consideration, what follows is that hammering out the details of immigration policy is a matter of prudential judgment about which Catholics of good will can reasonably disagree. It is definitely true that Catholics have to take a generous attitude toward immigrants. But it does not follow that there can be no restrictions on immigration, and indeed the Church has taught precisely the opposite of that. Hence, it is unjust and uncharitable to pretend that anyone who has reservations about immigration policy, illegal immigration, and the like must be motivated by racism.

**CWR:** How do proponents of Critical Race Theory (CRT) present the key tenets of their belief system? What problems do you find with those presentations and claims?

**Feser:** CRT started out as a movement in academic legal studies, but its key ideas soon spread far beyond that to various other fields in the social sciences and humanities, and then through them outside the universities altogether and into education, corporate human resources departments, criminal justice reform movements, political activism, and so on.

The central thesis of CRT is that racism runs far, far deeper in Western society than what most people think of when they hear that word. When most people hear “racism,” they think of segregation, the KKK, discriminatory hiring practices, and the like. CRT writers claim that even if all of that sort of thing were completely eliminated, we would barely have scratched the surface. They hold that racism actually permeates every nook and cranny of society – the entire legal system, popular culture, and the mindset and actions even of people who think of themselves as opposed to racism.

For example, popularizers of CRT like Ibram X. Kendi claim that any “inequity” between races constitutes racism. For instance, if some ethnic group makes up 10% of the population but does not make up 10% of stockbrokers, or doctors, or whatever, then for Kendi that is definitive evidence of racism. And anyone who proposes an alternative explanation (for example, in terms of cultural differences between groups) is dismissed by him as racist. It’s that simpleminded and dogmatic.

CRT writers also claim that the racism they say permeates society is to be found in “implicit bias” and “microaggressions.” “Implicit bias” involves hostility or negative attitudes that are so subtle that the person who harbors them is not even aware of them. “Microaggressions” are racist actions that are so subtle that the people committing them are not even aware they are doing so. Imagine, for example, that a white person who is politically liberal and thinks of himself as free of any racist attitudes fails to smile at a black person at the supermarket. CRT writers propose that this is a “microaggression” that manifests “implicit bias,” and that if the person in question denies it, then that simply shows how deep and unconscious his racism really is.

Another CRT popularizer, Robin DiAngelo, gives the label “white fragility” to this sort of denial. For her and Kendi, if you deny that you harbor any racist attitudes, that is itself evidence that you are racist. This

alleged racism is so subtle that only people versed in CRT can be trusted to see it, and to disagree with the CRT analysis is itself just further evidence of racism. Naturally, this is a recipe for fanaticism. There is no evidence for the specific kinds of racism CRT posits, and there could not be given that it is defined in such a way that it is invisible unless you read CRT into what would otherwise seem to be innocuous phenomena.

But it gets much worse. Familiar traditional themes of the civil rights movement such as color-blind policy, judging people as individuals rather than as members of groups, individual rights, anti-discrimination laws – all of this is rejected by CRT writers. They think of these ideas as masks for racism that serve to uphold white supremacy. Kendi, for example, advocates discrimination as a way of equalizing outcomes, DiAngelo holds that “anti-blackness” is inherent to “whiteness” so that all white people are complicit in racism, and so on.

There are no good arguments for any of this. It is all just asserted as if it were revealed from on high, and all possible disagreement is demonized right out of the gate as racist. It is also obviously a recipe for massively increasing racial tension rather than providing any solutions. And it gives the lie to the disinformation peddled by defenders of CRT when they characterize it as interested merely in teaching about the history of racism. It is not about that at all. It is about pushing an extreme ideology that even many liberal voters find disturbing when they learn the content of it.

**CWR:** “Like Marxism,” you write, “CRT is a grave perversion of the good cause it claims to represent, and it is utterly incompatible with Catholic social teaching.” First, does CRT—historically, politically, philosophically—have a relationship with Marxism? Secondly, what is the crux of the incompatibility you mention?

**Feser:** Individual Marxists like Antonio Gramsci had a direct influence on the movement. Gramsci famously held that oppressive bourgeois power maintains itself by way of “hegemony” over the cultural assumptions and institutions of society. CRT posits the same sort of thing, except that it puts “white supremacy” in the driver’s seat instead of bourgeois economic power. Gramsci also advocated countering this hegemony by working to get an alternative, revolutionary Marxist worldview to permeate the institutions of society. CRT has adapted this into its own playbook, and the

prevalence of CRT ideas in the universities, schools, government agencies, corporate human resources departments, and popular entertainment is the result.

In a more general way, CRT has been influenced by Marxism by way of the central Marxist theme that social life and history are at bottom about the struggle between inherently hostile classes. For the Marxist, these classes are to be understood in economic terms, with the struggle between them being the conflict between oppressive capitalists and exploited workers. CRT alters this by interpreting social life and history instead in racial rather than economic terms, as a war between the oppressive forces of “white supremacy” and oppressed “people of color.”

In this respect, CRT is disturbingly similar to German National Socialism, which also replaced the Marxist’s obsession with class with an obsession with race. The players are different insofar as for the Nazis the alleged oppressors were Jews and the allegedly oppressed group was the German nation. But the basic worldview is in other respects alarmingly similar. For CRT writers, as for the Nazis, absolutely everything is about race, no one can escape the perspective of his or her race, and races are inherently at odds.

Marxists also tend to evaluate ideas in ideological terms. If you present a criticism of Marxist ideas, the reaction is not “Is this correct?” but rather “Whose interest does this serve?” CRT writers are very similar. They tend not to engage the actual arguments of their critics, but rather to attribute bad motives to them, to put emphasis on the race of the person who raises the criticism, and so on.

The Church has strongly and consistently condemned these sorts of attitudes. She condemns the thesis that social life and history are fundamentally about a struggle between inherently hostile classes, and insists that the groups that make up society must see themselves as in partnership rather than intrinsically at odds. She condemns the tendency to evaluate ideas in terms of which ideological interest is served rather than by appeal to objective standards of truth and rationality. She condemns the socialist assumption that all inequalities are as such evidence of injustice. She condemns a vengeful attitude toward alleged oppressors and policies such as reverse discrimination. I quote the relevant documents in the book.

These various condemnations that the Church has issued against Marxism and other totalitarian ideologies manifestly apply no less to CRT, because the *reasons for* the condemnations apply in the one case no less than in the others.

**CWR:** Is CRT best understood as a political philosophy or as a sort of secular religion? Or something altogether?

**Feser:** There is nothing per se wrong with religion, so I wouldn't use that characterization to criticize CRT. What I would say, though, is that it is fair to characterize the CRT movement as a *cult*, which is a perversion of religion. People drawn to it have a cult-like tendency both to treat CRT as if it were some divine revelation that at last has uncovered the unseen truth about the world, and to dogmatically refuse even to consider any criticism of it.

More specifically, I would say that CRT has many features in common with what are historically known as Gnostic systems of thought. Like Gnosticism, it tends to portray ordinary everyday reality, including the parts that seem perfectly innocuous, as in fact the manifestations of a sinister power. It tends toward a simplistic Manichean division of society into warring forces of darkness and light, with an omnipresent and near-omnipotent "white supremacy" playing the former role and CRT-inspired "antiracist" activists playing the latter. Like Gnosticism, it represents this alleged truth about the world as something that has been hidden by these dark forces, and which has been revealed only to those with special insight, in this case, those who have been enlightened by CRT and its gurus.

**CWR:** What is the overall approach, in terms of analysis and criticism, that you take to CRT in your book?

**Feser:** I first devote a chapter to setting out the basic themes of CRT as it is developed in the work of founders of the movement like Derrick Bell and Kimberlé Crenshaw, and popularizers like Kendi and DiAngelo. I provide many quotes from their writings so that the reader can see how extreme their views really are, and that this extremism has not been exaggerated by the critics of CRT. In the following chapter, I discuss the philosophical problems with CRT, such as the many logical fallacies routinely committed by its proponents. In the chapter after that, I show how the claims of CRT

are unsupported by any actual evidence from social science, and in fact conflict with the social scientific evidence. Then, in a final chapter, I spell out the relevant teaching from the social doctrine of the Church, and show how CRT conflicts with it. So, I try to provide a fairly comprehensive critique that considers all the main issues.

**CWR:** When word of your book was first posted on Twitter, a number of people made remarks along the lines that you, being a white man, shouldn't write about CRT, that you have no idea what you are talking about, and so forth. Is it fair to say that such dismissive and adolescent attacks are not so much a bug as they are a feature of CRT proponents?

**Feser:** This reaction illustrates the way in which CRT is a cult rather than a serious academic enterprise. The critics you cite were not raising objections to the specific claims and arguments of the book, because it hadn't been published yet. So, naturally, they hadn't even seen it. What they found objectionable was rather the very idea that someone was criticizing CRT. That is not the sort of attitude taken by a scholar or any other rational person interested in the pursuit of truth. It is the sort of attitude characteristic of a fanatic or an ideologue.

These sorts of reactions are indeed a feature rather than a bug of the CRT worldview, because of its essentially relativist view of knowledge. If you take the view that no one can transcend his race, then you are bound to judge all criticism in terms of the race of the person raising the criticisms. What the CRT proponent fails to see is that this cuts both ways. If criticisms of CRT have no objective validity but just reflect the biases of the critic, then in the same way, CRT itself can be dismissed as having no objective validity, but as merely reflecting the biases of its proponents. CRT has no coherent way of avoiding this basic and rather obvious problem, and it shows how superficial and intellectually flimsy the whole project is.

**CWR:** Any final thoughts?

**Feser:** This was not a book I wrote because of any inherent value or interest in the subject. CRT articles and books are among the most depressingly unpleasant and intellectually uninteresting things I've ever had to read. People attracted to this stuff are absolutely fixated on race,

seething with anger, and unable to string together a coherent argument. It's a deeply irrational and ugly vision of human life.

The reason I wrote it is that faithful Catholics and other people of good will need to be aware of this, and of how extreme and dangerous these ideas are. There is a foolish tendency among some people to think that, because this movement cloaks itself in noble-sounding rhetoric and innocuous phrases like “anti-racism,” there must be some good in it. That is as naïve as thinking that there must be something good in Marxism, on the grounds that Marxists talk a lot about the plight of the poor.

Well, the Church is second to none in her concern for the poor, but she has also always insisted that Marxism is an evil ideology and that Catholics cannot collaborate with it, but must reject it root and branch. As I show in the book, CRT is no less noxious, and must be firmly rejected by Catholics for analogous reasons. It can only make things worse, not better.

But it would be a mistake to end things on that negative note. The good news is that the Church already provides sound principles for criticizing racism, and in fact has done so for centuries. And that is what the first part of the book is about.

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