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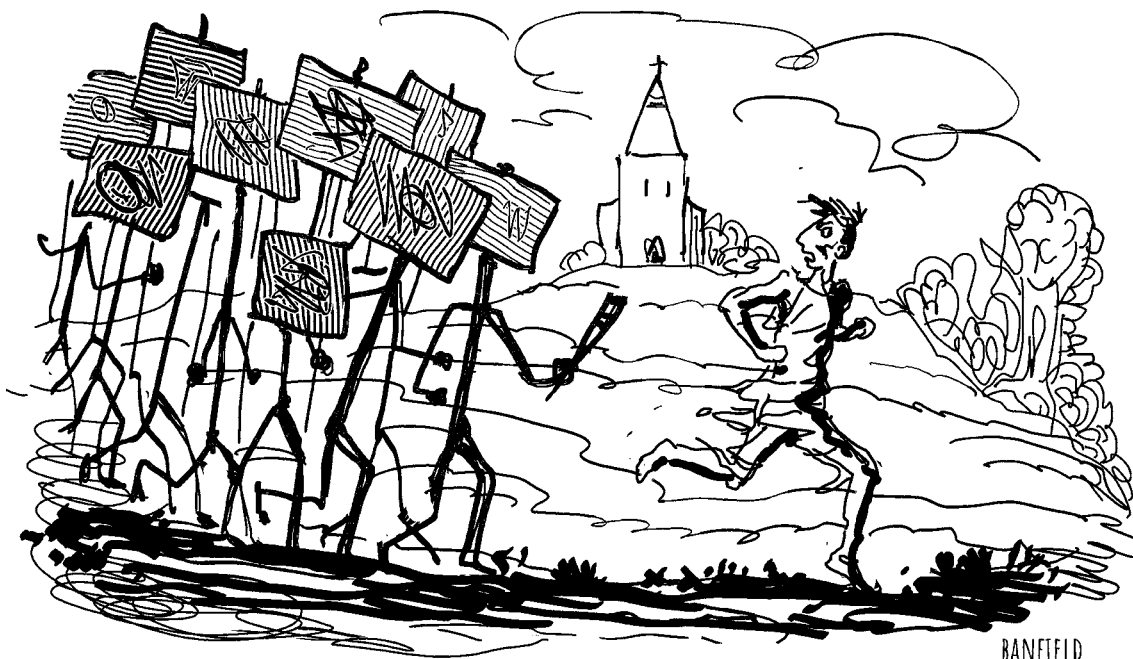
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Book Review by Robert R. Reilly

MADE IN GOD'S IMAGE

All One in Christ: A Catholic Critique of Racism and Critical Race Theory, by Edward Feser.
Ignatius Press, 163 pages, \$17.95



CRITICAL RACE THEORY IS SO INTELLECTUALLY empty that it might not seem worth criticizing. But “CRT”—the fashionable new code of dogmas, slogans, and political demands regarding race—should not be underestimated. It has infiltrated almost every institution of learning, the media, government, the corporate world, and even the military. It is now close to a mandatory doctrine. So, Edward Feser’s *All One in Christ: A Catholic Critique of Racism and Critical Race Theory* is an important rejoinder, delivered in an accessible way for a wide audience, not just specialists and Catholics.

Though the body of the book is concerned with refuting CRT’s major premises, the opening and closing chapters delineate the Catholic Church’s teaching against racism. Feser contrasts the racial tribalism of CRT with the expansive and ennobling anthropology of Christianity throughout its many centuries of existence. Drawing on papal encyclicals and Scholastic philosophy, Feser demonstrates that CRT’s regressive approach to race is most fully and consistently answered by the teaching and traditions of the Church.

This is doubly important because the relevant contributions of the Church, in both word and deed, have often been ignored, mischaracterized, or at least played down in to-

day’s debates on racism and its history. This not only undermines the reputation and position of the Church, but worse, it shuts off its unique and important contributions from the current discourse.

The heart of Feser’s book, however, explains and then demolishes Critical Race Theory on a logical and philosophical basis. His own competence is in the field of philosophy, to which he has contributed several notable books from his post as a professor at Pasadena City College. In his chapter on “Philosophical Problems with Critical Race Theory,” he exposes the myriad logical fallacies in CRT’s central arguments. He takes no prisoners.

For those who have not paid attention to the pronouncements of CRT’s academic exponents, Feser’s chapter on “What Is Critical Race Theory?” is eye-opening. On the evidence he presents, CRT seems to be little more than a giant tautology. If asked to prove that something or someone is racist, the rejoinder is that the question itself is racist. If you claim not to be racist, that proves your “implicit bias” toward racism. Colorblind laws are not non-racist, but actually racist. Pointing out the tautological nature of the argument is a “micro-” or maybe even a “macro-aggression.” Feser writes that “CRT claims

that racism permeates every aspect of human life, even into the unconscious motivations and seemingly innocent actions of individuals who suppose themselves not to be racist. It claims that any resistance to this CRT analysis is itself a manifestation of this omnipresent racism.” And round and round we go.

THIS IS REMINISCENT OF FRIEDRICH Nietzsche’s denigration of classical Greek philosophy as a façade behind which lurked the will to power, to which all things are reducible. Similarly, CRT holds that being against racism is a façade. Whites are not trying to understand or assist blacks and other people of color but to dominate them. This Nietzschean point of view makes the truth unavailable by any means and reduces the search for it to another form of political struggle—which is what CRT is. After all, Feser asks, “Why not say the same of Critical Race Theory itself? Why not regard it as merely another mask for the ‘will to power,’ worn by those who envy and resent whites—and thus as having no more objective validity or claim to truth than the views CRT criticizes?”

CRT’s only answer to this question is: because you are white, and white people are racist. Feser cites CRT thinker Robin DiAngelo’s view that “a positive white identity is an impos-



sible goal” for “white identity is inherently racist [and] white people do not exist outside the system of white supremacy.” In fact, “racism... pervades every vestige of our reality.” Isn’t this the obverse of what white racists thought of black people? Is the solution to racism to reverse the roles and have black people think this way of white people? Yes, says Ibram X. Kendi in *How to Be an Antiracist* (2019): “The only remedy to racist discrimination is antiracist discrimination. The only remedy to past discrimination is present discrimination.”

FESER RIGHTLY POINTS OUT THAT there is essentially no difference between CRT ideology and Communist or Nazi ideology. Simply substitute race for class and it works pretty much the same way. As Feser says, it also has a Maoist flavor. Kendi calls for “constant self-criticism, and regular self-examination...a radical reorientation of our consciousness.” This is clearly redolent of Maoist ideological struggle sessions held to produce confessions and total thought conformity. Can something like President Xi’s social credit score be far behind?

In a line reminiscent of the French Revolution’s formula “no enemies to the left,” Kendi proclaims that “we cannot be antiracist if we are homophobic or transphobic.” As President Joe Biden proclaimed, “[R]acism, anti-semitism, homophobia, transphobia—they’re all connected.” This package deal increases the pool of support for CRT. As confirmation that CRT indoctrination works, Feser cites political scientist Eric Kaufmann’s evidence “that the percentage of white liberals who regarded racism as a serious problem went from under 40 percent in 2014 to over 80 percent in 2017.”

Of course, since CRT is a racist ideology, it comes closest to Nazism. Like Nazi theory, CRT holds that race is the engine and key to history, and similarly its aim is power. Feser writes, “If you substitute ‘white people’ for ‘Jews’ and ‘people of color’ for ‘Germans,’ the resemblance is eerie.” In fact, “it would be difficult to distinguish Critical Race Theory literature from the ugly propaganda of Nazism. Its claims are comparably extreme, even if it has not (yet?) led to comparable levels of violence. It also has manifestly totalitarian implications.” Indeed, if moral character is determined by color, if conduct is caused by forces outside of people’s control, then, logically, they must be controlled by others. Voilà, a totalitarian state is on its way. Are the CRT people unaware of the highly unattractive provenance of their ideas?

Feser says that Greg Lukianoff and Jonathan Haidt, coauthors of *The Coddling of the American Mind* (2018), point out that “seeing

the world through the lenses of such CRT concepts can actually do serious damage to mental health.” Indeed, the more indoctrinated in the ideology, the greater the decline in the ability to recognize reality. Feser does not mention the 1619 Project, but it is a good example of CRT blindness. As a grievance-based ideology, CRT is bereft of the moral realism that enables one to see things as they are. It prefers furious unknowing.

EVEN THOUGH HIS PHILOSOPHICAL ARGUMENTS stand solidly on their own ground, Feser’s framing chapters on Christian teaching supply something of profound significance that, if allowed to become part of the public discourse, might contribute mightily to it. As Alexis de Tocqueville observed, “It was necessary that Jesus Christ come to earth to make it understood that all members of the human species are naturally alike and equal.” In other words, Christianity is the most powerful antidote to racism. In the first chapter, Feser supplies the passage from Saint Paul’s Letter to the Galatians, from which the book takes its title: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (3:26-28). A range

of papal citations then demonstrates how this scriptural principle has been reaffirmed and defended throughout the Church’s long history. In 1937, Pope Pius XI enraged Adolf Hitler with the encyclical *Mit brennender Sorge* (With Burning Anxiety), which he pointedly wrote in German, not Latin: “Whoever exalts race, or the people...divinizes them to an idolatrous level, distorts and perverts an order of the world planned and created by God.” Feser also quotes from the extraordinary 1537 papal bull, *Sublimis Deus* (The Sublime God), in which Pope Paul III condemned the enslavement of West Indian and South American natives. Paul attributed that evil, “unheard of before now,” to “the enemy of the human race,” Satan. “Indians and all other people who may later be discovered by Christians, are by no means to be deprived of their liberty or the possession of their property,” wrote the pope: they should “freely and legitimately, enjoy their liberty and the possessions of their property; nor should they be in any way enslaved.” In 1839, Pope Gregory XVI closed *In Supremo Apostolatus* (“Endowed with the Highest Apostolic Authority”) by prohibiting “any Ecclesiastic or lay person from presuming to defend as permissible this trade in Blacks under no matter what pretext or excuse.”

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SUPPORTING THIS VIEW WERE SOME OF the great Scholastic theologians of the day. The Thomist thinker Francisco de Vitoria insisted that Indians had a right to their property and to their own rulers. The cleric Bartolomé de Las Casas, after he became bishop of Chiapas in modern-day Mexico, forbade absolution to those who subjected the Indians to forced labor. Somewhat later, in the 16th century, Spanish Jesuit Francisco Suárez held that “in the nature of things all men are born free.” Well before Thomas Jefferson, Suárez’s Italian contemporary Robert Cardinal Bellarmine said that “all men are born naturally free and equal.” And in 1839, Pope Gregory XVI ordered that “no one in the future dare to bother unjustly, despoil of their possessions, or reduce to slavery...Blacks.”

In addition to the many valuable quotations and citations that Feser supplies, I would add one of the most remarkable and perhaps the earliest. In the 4th century A.D., Saint Gregory of Nyssa delivered a homily on Ecclesiastes which is worth quoting at length for its extraordinary rhetoric and also, of course, for its substance. Reflecting on the buying and selling of slaves, Saint Gregory asked:

For what price, tell me? What did you find in existence worth as much as this human nature? What price did you put on rationality?... God said let us make man in our image, after our likeness. If he is in the likeness of God, and...has

been granted authority over everything on earth from God, who is his buyer, tell me? Who is his seller? To God alone belongs this power; or rather, not even to God himself. For his gracious gifts...are irrevocable. God himself would not reduce the human race to slavery, since he himself, when we had been enslaved to sin, recalled us to freedom.... Your origin is from the same ancestors, your life is of the same kind, sufferings of soul and body prevail alike over you who own him and over the one who is subject to your ownership—pains and pleasures, merriment and distress, sorrows and delights, rages and terrors, sickness and death. Is there any difference in these things between the slave and his owner? Do they not draw in the same air as they breathe? Do they not see the sun in the same way?... If you are equal in all these ways, therefore, in what respect, have you something extra, tell me, that you who are human think yourself the master of a human being and say, “I bought male and female slaves,” like herds of goats or pigs.

Shortly thereafter, in the early 5th century A.D., Saint Augustine taught that God “did not wish the rational being, made in his own image, to have dominion over any but irrational creatures: not man over man, but man over the beasts.”

TODAY, FESER ARGUES, THE CHURCH PROclaims the same gospel against the new racism of Critical Race Theory. Consistent with all prior teaching, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* asserts that “any theory or form whatsoever of...racial discrimination is morally unacceptable.” Feser’s philosophical orientation is Thomist, and this book’s use of both reason and revelation against CRT is, in a way, a demonstration of the power of Aquinas’s reconciliation of faith and reason. CRT receives it from both barrels.

Signs of hope have already begun to appear. A new Florida law proscribes any curriculum designed to “indoctrinate” students into thinking any person “is inherently racist, sexist, or oppressive, whether consciously or unconsciously, solely by virtue of his or her race or sex” or that any person “by virtue of his or her race or sex” bears responsibility for “actions committed in the past by other members of the same race or sex.”

This book deserves a wide audience. Its powerful arguments will empower the reader to confront CRT insanity, help roll it back, and prevent its further advances. We are, after all, “All One,” which is what made our republic possible. A successful CRT assault on this truth would make it impossible. Those are the stakes.

Robert R. Reilly is the author, most recently, of America on Trial: A Defense of the Founding (Ignatius Press).

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