

McLean Bible Church Pastors Espouse Critical Race Theory

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SUMMARY:

The well-documented, public record of McLean Bible Church (MBC) pastors shows that they espouse the body of concepts referred to as critical race theory (CRT) in spite of recent efforts to deny¹ or downplay² their support for CRT.

MBC pastors have promoted CRT concepts, thinkers, and writings, while dismissing and ignoring criticism of CRT from Christian thinkers.

MBC pastors have taught CRT from the pulpit, at a nationwide conference, in classes at church, in online videos and podcasts, and in social media posts.

The following examples provide an illustrative though not exhaustive account of multiple instances in which MBC pastors have publicly espoused CRT.

MBC Pastors Have...

1. Promoted CRT Concepts to the Public and Spoken of a Desire to “Torch All White People.”

Pastor Mike Kelsey presented basic CRT concepts³ on the Jennie Allen podcast (founder of IF:Gathering):

[W]hen we talk about systemic racism and how historic racism has contributed to conditions today, obviously in American society, the construct of race was designed to oppress people of African descent and maximize people of European descent. **What that means is that white people in our country, even though they have not chosen it, are continual beneficiaries of a system of racism.** There is no escaping that. A lot of people, their immediate pushback is that they didn't do anything wrong, they didn't have any slaves. But there is privilege attached to the color of your skin in this country. (emphasis in original)

Kelsey also admitted his “anger” and said, “To be totally honest, it’s difficult for me sometimes not to just torch all white people, specifically white evangelicals and Christians.”

2. Advertised and Participated in a Black Lives Matters March Led by Pro-CRT Organizers.

Pastors David Platt⁴ and Mike Kelsey⁵ both advertised and participated in an ostensibly Christian, Black Lives Matters (BLM) march.

Kelsey tweeted a photo⁶ with his son holding a sign that said “Black lives matter to God” with the hashtag #blacklivesmatter and emojis of raised fists commonly used to signify BLM.

¹ <https://mcleanbible.org/eldernominees#crt>

² <https://mcleanbible.org/eldernominees#blm>

³ <https://www.jennieallen.com/blog/where-do-we-go-from-here-with-mike-kelsey>

⁴ <https://twitter.com/plattdavid/status/1269585035444867074>

⁵ <https://twitter.com/mikekelsey/status/1269659459682553862>

⁶ <https://twitter.com/mikekelsey/status/1270032977968447489>

This march was organized by the pro-CRT pastor, Thabiti Anyabwile⁷ and Faith+Works, an organization started by Anyabwile's Anacostia River Church.

Faith+Works endorses the pro-CRT organization The Witness: A Black Christian Collective⁸ and Jemar Tisby's book, The Color of Compromise⁹.

3. Endorsed Multiple Pro-CRT Resources, including The New York Times' The 1619 Project.

Pastor Mike Kelsey appeared on the podcast of author Annie F. Downs and endorsed a number of pro-CRT resources¹⁰:

Pro-CRT Organizations: the aforementioned Witness: A Black Christian Collective and the Asian American Christian Collaborative.

Pro-CRT Works: Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race by Christian Smith and Michael O. Emerson; The 1619 Project, led by Nikole Hannah-Jones and published by The New York Times; and the aforementioned The Color of Compromise: The Truth about the American Church's Complicity in Racism by Jemar Tisby.

Kelsey also appeared on Downs' podcast with MBC Pastor Eric Saunders¹¹ and separately with Tisby¹².

Note that Tisby recently joined the pro-CRT Center for Antiracism Research led by Ibram X. Kendi and serves as the Center's Assistant Director of Narrative and Advocacy.¹³

4. Taught CRT from the Pulpit at MBC and at a Nationwide Conference.

On May 17, 2020, multiple MBC Pastors shared their pro-CRT views during the Sunday sermon on "Unity in Diversity".¹⁴

Pastor Eric Saunders criticized those who want to look carefully at the facts of a particular case in which racism has been alleged. Rather, he told people to focus on the broader narrative of anti-black racism that has lasted throughout the entire history of the U.S.

If I could give an analogy related to a movie of so many people, we view the events around the death of Ahmaud Arbery, many people say in order to deal with these events, we need to pause the narrative and freeze frame it and focus on the facts of this case, we need to focus on these facts disconnected from other racist events in our country's history. However, when I look in the eyes of my mother or even think about my father or think about my family, we can't do that. This event is connected to a narrative that has gone, that is as old as our nation's history. This narrative includes names like Alton Sterling and Philando Castile and Emmett Till and others. And the

⁷ <https://twitter.com/NewActivists/status/1277669546338521088>

⁸ <https://twitter.com/FaithWorksDC/status/1270845031604199425>

⁹ <https://twitter.com/FaithWorksDC/status/1275257442784419842>

¹⁰ <https://www.anniefdowns.com/podcast/episode-223-mike-kelsey/> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rVXTul7jjUo>

¹¹ <https://www.anniefdowns.com/podcast/tsf-with-mike-kelsey-qa-mike-friends/>

¹² <https://www.anniefdowns.com/podcast/episode-231-mike-kelsey/>

¹³ <https://twitter.com/dribram/status/1374722839559954438>

¹⁴ <https://radical.net/sermon/unity-in-diversity/> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R1cNneKJNww>

theme of this sad narrative sadly is this, that this country, including many people that name Jesus Christ as Lord, could care less about the rights of black lives and could care less about their very lives.

Similarly, Pastor James Park contended that systemic bias against Asian-Americans has always existed in the U.S.:

[W]e are realizing that no matter how hard we try to be fully accepted, we will perpetually be foreigners and outsiders. Seeing how easily our place in society has changed almost overnight we realize this is not a normal symptom caused by a virus but a symptom of an underlying systemic bias which has been there all along.

However, as early as January 14, 2018, in his sermon, *Praying & Working for Justice: Racialization*¹⁵, Pastor David Platt was already introducing CRT concepts.

For example, Platt spoke about “racialization” in familiar, CRT-inspired terms:

So for now, I want to encourage us to look at the reality of racialization. I’m using this term to refer to a society in which race—and specifically black or white skin color—profoundly affects people’s economic, political and social experiences. It’s a society in which race is significant enough to at least be regularly acknowledged and mentioned.

Platt went on to assert that everyone contributes to racialization, whether one knows it or not, and whether one actually holds prejudices or not. In other words, according to Platt, whether one has discriminatory intent is irrelevant.

[A] disparity exists. We can’t deny this. These are not opinions—they’re facts. It matters in our country whether one is white or black. Now, we don’t want it to matter, which is why I think we try to convince ourselves it doesn’t matter. We think to ourselves, “I don’t hold prejudices toward black or white people, so racism is not my problem.” But this is where we need to see that racialization is our problem. It’s all of our problem. We subtly, almost unknowingly, contribute to it.

Note that Platt also preached a version of this sermon at the Together for The Gospel (T4G) conference.¹⁶

5. Invited a Pro-CRT Speaker Who Calls Generations of White People “Complicit” in the Murder of Martin Luther King to Speak at MBC Events.

On April 4, 2018, the aforementioned Pastor Thabiti Anyabwile wrote an essay¹⁷ for The Gospel Coalition declaring “We Await Repentance for Assassinating Dr. King” and “[m]y white neighbors and Christian brethren can start by at least saying their parents and grandparents and this country are complicit in *murdering a man who only preached love and justice.*” (emphasis in original).

¹⁵ <http://s3.amazonaws.com/radical-net-assets/images/20180427185415/011418-Platt-Praying-and-Working-for-Justice.pdf> (transcript) and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UUs5mQ0WBP8>

¹⁶ <https://t4g.org/resources/david-platt/let-justice-roll-like-waters-racism-need-repentance/>

¹⁷ <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/thabiti-anyabwile/await-repentance-assassinating-dr-king/>

A few days later, on April 8, 2018, Anyabwile served on an MBC all-campus panel discussion on “Race and the Local Church”¹⁸ at MBC Tysons along with MBC Pastors David Platt, Dale Sutherland, Mike Kelsey, Eric Saunders, and others.

The next year, Anyabwile was “honored keynote” speaker at the 2019 New City Network Gala¹⁹. NCN is the church planting network run by MBC and the Southern Baptist Convention.

More recently, Anyabwile endorsed what he called “a thoughtful, warm, positive, constructive treatment of Critical Race Theory.”²⁰ This treatment, which draws “heavily” from pro-CRT scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, states “Because marginalization and oppression in pigmentocracies operate along racialized lines, Christians should share the common interests of critical race theorists.”²¹

6. Signed a Manifesto on Race from a Pro-CRT Organization.

Pastor Mike Kelsey signed²² the Statement on Anti-Asian Racism in the Time of Covid-19²³, published by the Asian-American Christian Collaborative (AACC).

Among other things, the statement declares, “Faithful Christian witness requires anti-racist work.”

To understand what “anti-racist work” entails, note that the AACC endorses numerous pro-CRT resources, including Ibram X. Kendi’s book, *How to Be an Antiracist*,²⁴ which states, “One either believes problems are rooted in groups of people, as a racist, or locates the roots of problems in power and policies, as an antiracist.”²⁵ Further, he says “The claim of ‘not racist’ neutrality is a mask for racism.”

7. Taught a Pro-CRT Sunday School Class.

MBC pastors taught a pro-CRT Sunday school class during the summer of 2020: *The Gospel, The Church, Justice, and Race*.²⁶

The class description lists only one required reading for the class: *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America*, stating “[t]his book is intended to introduce participants to unique challenges in multi-racial churches based on research; requiring it does not mean we endorse or agree with every conclusion drawn in it.”

However, the basic mode of reasoning expressed by MBC pastors on race, systems, and structures, is reflected in this book²⁷:

[W]hite evangelical prescriptions do not address major issues of racialization. They do not solve such structural issues as inequality in health care, economic inequality, police mistreatment, unequal access to educational opportunities, racially imbalanced

¹⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E8OPhchWDrA>

¹⁹ <https://newcitygala.org/> and <https://www.facebook.com/events/369925333696217/>

²⁰ <https://twitter.com/thabitianyabwil/status/1233044491571015681>

²¹ <https://faithfullymagazine.com/critical-race-theory-christians/>

²² <https://www.asianamericanchristiancollaborative.com/friends-aa>

²³ <https://www.asianamericanchristiancollaborative.com/read-statement>

²⁴ <https://www.asianamericanchristiancollaborative.com/recommended-resources>

²⁵ <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/564299/how-to-be-an-antiracist-by-ibram-x-kendi/> (p. 9)

²⁶ <https://mcleanbible.org/event-detail/The%20Gospel,%20the%20Church,%20Justice,%20and%20Race/134481/>

²⁷ <https://vialogue.wordpress.com/2019/12/03/divided-by-faith-reflections-notes/> (excerpted from pp. 131-32)

environmental degradation, unequal political power, residential segregation, job discrimination, or even congregational segregation. White evangelical solutions do not challenge or change the U.S. society that “allocates differential economic, political, social, and even psychological rewards” to racial groups. In short, their prescriptions fail to render race inconsequential for life opportunities.

The result...is that white evangelicals, without any necessary intent, help to buttress the racialized society. Like their forebears during Jim Crow segregation, who prescribed kindness toward people of other races and getting to know people across races, but did not challenge the Jim Crow system, present-day white evangelicals attempt to solve the race problem without shaking the foundations on which racialization is built. As long as they do not see or acknowledge the structures of racialization, they inadvertently contribute to them. And, insofar as they continue to give solutions that do not challenge racialization, they allow racial inequality and division to continue unabated.

8. Led a Discussion Group on a Book by a Pro-CRT Author.

Pastor Mike Kelsey led an online book discussion group on Esau McCaulley’s *Reading While Black*.²⁸

In this book, McCaulley contends that he does not need to provide evidence to support his claims on race and policing, stating, “I am skeptical that statistics will convince those hostile to our cause. Furthermore, statistics are unnecessary for those who carry the experience of being Black in this country in their hearts. We know, and this book is for us.”²⁹

Recently, McCaulley stated that there is “a *consensus* that arises out of the Black Christian community. And that consensus says that systemic racism exists in the world.”³⁰ (emphasis in original)

9. Dismissed Criticism of CRT and Questioned the Motives of CRT’s Christian Critics.

Pastor Mike Kelsey responded to those who sent him links to sermons on race and justice from Voddie Baucham, pastor and theology dean at African Christian University, by sharing a post from Baucham’s son-in-law Phillip Holmes.³¹ Kelsey called this post a “helpful reflection.”³²

Holmes’ post consisted of a series of rhetorical questions that called into question the motives of Christians who share Baucham’s sermons, such as “Am I hoping that my black brothers and sisters will be convinced by Voddie because he’s black?”

Nowhere in these posts did Kelsey nor Holmes address the substance of Baucham’s teachings, which are solidly opposed to CRT.³³

²⁸ <https://www.facebook.com/mikekelseyjr/posts/10109771732381828>

²⁹ https://www.google.com/books/edition/Reading_While_Black/TtLZDwAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&pg=PA41 (p. 41)

³⁰ <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2021/07/esau-mccaulley-black-christianity/619371/>

³¹ <https://www.facebook.com/phillipholmes87/posts/2550226468559384>

³² <https://www.facebook.com/mikekelseyjr/posts/10109477922748688>

³³ <https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/TM19-9/irreconcilable-views-of-reconciliation-voddie-baucham> and <https://www.voddiebaucham.org/product/fault-lines-hardback/> (published more recently; for reference on Baucham’s views)