

Wokeness and Racism: Contemporary Challenges to the Evangelical Church

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KEY WORDS

| Church | Critical Race Theory | Evangelical |
| Racism | Repentance | Wokeness |

ABSTRACT

The Evangelical church has faced challenges throughout its history and today is no exception. Currently, the “wokeness” challenge comes as a movement stressing help and hope for the downtrodden. From this movement, organizations such as Black Lives Matter have arisen to address some of the racial issues that exist in this country. However, as the “woke” movement has progressed, many of the principles espoused in wokeness hinder or contradict the foundational principles that the church has long held, bringing confusion to the church’s purpose and mission. These factors, promoted by the wokeness movement, have created theological pressure within the Evangelical church, causing it to adapt to the new “woke” philosophies and drawing it away from biblical doctrine. Consequently, the Evangelical church has drifted away from its purpose, and it is faced with the need to return to its biblical roots. The first three chapters of the Revelation of John provide insightful directions for repentance and restoration for the church. Through repentance and careful examination of biblical teaching, those who are part of the Evangelical church can once again participate in the fulfillment its divine purpose, leading the church back to its evangelical roots.

INTRODUCTION. WOKENESS AND RACISM: CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES TO THE EVANGELICAL CHURCH

In recent days, the world has seen the rise of “Wokeness.” This phenomenon has taken root in several areas of contemporary life and has affected every avenue of our culture. Due to the regular discourse of wokeness in Western media,¹ the evangelical community has not been immune to its influence, nor can it remain silent regarding some of the changes wokeness have brought to both society and the evangelical church. For purposes of this article, the term *evangelical* denotes the emphasis of the Bible as authoritative and inerrant, and the need for

conversion through a personal relationship with Christ. Church refers to a group of people who believe in Jesus Christ as their savior and Lord. These groups can include categorization into denominations. *Racism* means using the race of an individual or section of the population as a determining factor of human traits and value.² *Repentance* is the process of evaluating a position or course of action with the determination of a change of direction in that position or course of action. *Wokeness* refers to the current overall movement that addresses the needs of the downtrodden, typically comprised of minorities, and *Critical Race Theory* references the concept

1 Smith, David S., Lee Boag, Connor Keegan, and Alice Butler-Warke. “Land of Woke and Glory? The Conceptualisation and Framing of ‘Wokeness’ in UK Media and Public Discourses.” *JAVNOST-THE PUBLIC* 30, no. 4 (October 2, 2023): 513–33. doi:10.1080/13183222.2023.2273656

2 *Miriam Webster Dictionary*, “Racism,” Accessed August 18, 2024, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/racism>

that promotes privilege and oppression exerted by the White race toward non-whites.

Wokeness as a movement (defined below) has caught many in the church off-guard, sounding attractive but carrying a very different message. The teaching of wokeness has impacted the church by introducing doctrines contrary to the Bible. As such, this phenomenon has underscored the challenge of restoring biblical thinking to the evangelical community, and the need for reinstating biblical solutions that have been replaced by unbiblical “woke” ideas.

Doctrines that Evangelicals previously considered settled or beyond question now face redefinition by the woke agenda. Throughout the New Testament, God has given the Church directives regarding those it is to care for. Examples include Jesus calling the Church to care for the poor and hungry (Luke 6:20-21), the homeless, the imprisoned, (Matt. 25:31-40), and the handicapped (Luke 14:12-14). The epistle of James puts wealth and poverty in their proper perspective, stating that the poor brother is to boast in his high position, and the rich man should boast in his humiliation, recognizing that he will fade away (James 1:9-11). As a result of the instructions expressed in the New Testament, many ministries, such as the Salvation Army, and Feed My Starving Children, have been established to speak to these needs. However, the pressing needs of the poor and the homeless continue to grow.

The “woke” movement took root to address the issues of social inequalities which included racial injustice, racism, colonialism, fascism, capitalism, sexism, and gender inclusivity.³ Originally associated with the social injustices facing black Americans, the woke movement gained momentum when it became associated

with Black Lives Matter demonstrations in 2014.⁴ This article will focus on the theological and practical tensions the development of the woke movement and Critical Race Theory have brought to the evangelical church, as the church interacts with racial issues both internally and with society.

WOKENESS AND CRT, DEFINITIONS AND THEOLOGY

The “woke” movement is an ideological phenomenon, not associated with one leader or a particular set of leaders. The movement gained traction as a grassroots effort through activism, social media influence, and the efforts of different scholars, activists, and public figures. The term “woke” originally had its roots in the lyrics of a song written in 1928 by Willard “Ramblin” Thomas called, “Sawmill Moan.”⁵ The song’s lyrics used the term “woke,” referring to a lost love, but it also had a veiled reference to the deplorable conditions Black workers endured while working in the Southern sawmills at the time.⁶ The motivation behind the woke movement came primarily from a heartfelt caring for the oppressed and a real desire to find meaningful solutions.⁷

Atkins offered this definition of wokeness, “Wokeness is, broadly, the awareness of social injustice, institutional racism, and inequality.”⁸ This broad definition provided the seeds for the attention and care of the oppressed, giving them

3 Smith, Boag, Keegan, and Butler-Wade. “Land of Woke and Glory?” 2023.

4 Smith, Boag, Keegan, and Butler-Wade. “Land of Woke and Glory?” 2023.

5 Bloomberg, “Here’s where ‘woke’ comes from,” *Arkansas Gazette*, January 8, 2023.

6 Bloomberg, “Here’s where ‘woke’ comes from.”

7 J. Spencer Atkins, “Defining Wokeness,” *Social Epistemology* 37, no. 3 (2023): 322, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02691728.2022.2145857>.

8 Atkins, “Defining Wokeness,” 322.

a position of charity in the mind of the “woke” person. Atkins continues, explaining that, using the model of friendship as defined by Sarah Stroud, the woke person gives the marginalized individual the benefit of the doubt, not taking into consideration the association that person might have with a particular group.⁹ The approach of wokeness just described seems reasonable since individuals should be judged according to their specific actions rather than by their association to a group.

In a like manner, the church, following the mandates given by Jesus in Matthew 28, is to make disciples of all nations. The church is to make no distinction regarding race, since according to Paul, all have sinned and fall short of God’s glory, whether Jew or Gentile (Romans 3:23). Since all have sinned, God’s solution is eternal life through Christ, God’s gracious gift (Romans 6:23), and upon receiving redemption through Christ, all Christians are on equal footing before the Almighty regardless of race, gender, or social status (Gal. 3:28).

Beyond Jesus’s commandment in Matthew 28, Paul gave the church definite guidelines to follow. These guidelines include members living according to their calling in Christ, maintaining the unity of the body of Christ (Eph. 4:1-7), following Christ’s example of other minded service (Phil. 2:2-5), caring for the widows and orphans (James 1:27), and rejecting the deception of empty words that lead to destruction (Eph. 5:6). Therefore, maintaining a biblical worldview necessitates safeguarding their views as they consider the “woke” doctrines confronting them, measuring them against those biblical mandates directed toward the church, and assuring that their attitudes and actions remain consistent with the biblical principles listed above.

9 Atkins, “Defining Wokeness,” 322.

As woke concepts began to appear in society, a second concept, Critical Race Theory (CRT), appeared, challenging the church with these outwardly attractive ideas. “Woke” thought actively focused on marginalized groups. Similarly, Critical Race Theory (CRT) shared some of the specific criteria of wokeness.¹⁰ CRT’s core precepts include systemic racism, racial realism, intersectionality, critique of meritocracy, anti-essentialism, and interest convergence.¹¹ Each of these precepts is defined as follows:

- Systemic Racism: the assertion that racism is not just an individual occurrence but includes structures that diminish groups.
- Racial Realism: the proposition that racism is a normal and permanent part of society.
- Intersectionality and Anti-Essentialism: the social categories of race, class, and gender, that define the daily experience of those classified as such, and the magnification of the experience of an individual if that individual belonged to more than one of these categories.
- Critique of Meritocracy: the contention that merit is usually established by the dominant group.
- Interest Convergence: the contention that black people only achieve victories in civil rights when both Black and White people’s interests converge.¹²

Some in church leadership have been

10 Akwasi Opoku-Dakwa, and Darryl B. Rice. “A Place for Critical Race Theory and Wokeness in Diversity Strategies.” *Academy of Management Perspectives* 38, no. 2 (May 2024): 215. doi:10.5465/amp.2023.0015.

11 Akwasi Opoku-Dakwa, and Darryl B. Rice. “A Place for Critical Race Theory,” 215.

12 Akwasi Opoku-Dakwa, and Darryl B. Rice. “A Place for Critical Race Theory,” 215.

enticed to incorporate CRT in their teaching, including such Evangelical denominations as the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC).¹³ This adaptation is displayed when J. D. Greear, the president of the Southern Baptist Convention at that time, participated in a panel discussion regarding racism in 2020.¹⁴ In that discussion, Greear asserted that white people have been in power for so long that the rules of the denomination benefited white people at the expense of minorities, and that these “systemic laws” are not a matter of individual sinful bigotry, but a problem throughout American society.¹⁵

Historically, CRT finds its roots in Marxism.¹⁶ In his work, “The Communist Manifesto,” Karl Marx asserted that the history of society is the history of class struggles.¹⁷ The Communist Manifesto addressed the working class (Proletariat) and the “ruling class” or property-owning class (Bourgeoisie) in Germany, identifying the oppressor and the oppressed.¹⁸ Marx defined the struggle of the Proletariat against the Bourgeoisie and outlined the solution, a complete dismantling of the old system, and replacing it with a new one, ending the Communist Manifesto with the following declaration.

The Communists disdain to conceal their views and aims. They openly declare that their ends can be attained only by the forcible overthrow of all existing social conditions. Let the ruling classes

tremble at a Communistic revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have a world to win.¹⁹

Marx, using the Communist Manifesto, called for a Communistic revolution to overthrow the social construct of his time by force.²⁰ Currently, the revolutionary efforts have moved past the employment of physical confrontation, to the indoctrination of agents for cultural replacement.²¹ As a result, Marxism has experienced a morphing from its original violent revolutionary tactics to a battle of ideas, transforming the concept of “the Land of the Free” to “White Supremacy.”²² Those promoting CRT are using a process that includes both an ideological war and a long-term undermining of the existing culture to achieve the desired transformation.²³

In line with the goal of dismantling American society, CRT gained momentum with the formation of BlackLivesMatter since CRT teaches that America is systemically racist and presents an environment that is oppressive.²⁴ The solution to this environment is to legally discriminate against white people.²⁵ Like BlackLivesMatter, the CRT founders are Marxists and believe that all racial issues in society stem from America’s oppressive environment.²⁶ Ironically, the founders of

13 Megan Basham, *Shepherds for Sale*: (New York: Broadman Books, 2024), 121-5.

14 Basham, *Shepherds for Sale*, 121.

15 Basham, *Shepherds for Sale*, 125.

16 Karl Marx, and Friedrich Engels. “The Communist Manifesto.” 20.

17 Karl Marx, and Friedrich Engels. “The Communist Manifesto.” 20.

18 Karl Marx, and Friedrich Engels. “The Communist Manifesto.” 20.

19 Karl Marx, and Friedrich Engels. “The Communist Manifesto.” 101-2.

20 Karl Marx, and Friedrich Engels. “The Communist Manifesto.” 101-2.

21 Mike Gonzalez, “Zombie Marxism.” The Heritage Foundation. December 17, 2021. <https://www.heritage.org/progressivism/commentary/zombie-marxism>

22 Gonzalez, “Zombie Marxism.”

23 Gonzalez, “Zombie Marxism.”

24 Gonzalez, “Marxism Underpins Black Lives Matter Agenda.”

25 Gonzalez, “Marxism Underpins Black Lives Matter Agenda.”

26 Gonzalez, “Marxism Underpins Black Lives Matter

CRT managed to create their own racist system, vilifying white people as the source of all societal ills. Certainly, white people are not perfect, labelled accurately by the Bible as sinners and have contributed to the problems in society, but white people are not the only sinners involved in the societal dynamic that has fostered oppression and suffering.²⁷

#BlackLivesMatter was created in 2013 by Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi.²⁸ The creation of this organization was in response to the killing of Trayvon Martin by George Zimmerman. The purpose of this organization was to create “an ideological and political intervention in a world where Black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise.”²⁹ Garza explained that the movement speaks to how Black people are deprived of their dignity and human rights. The movement also, “affirms the lives of the Black queer, and trans folks, disabled folks, Black undocumented folks, folks with records, women, and all Black lives along the gender spectrum.”³⁰

As the movement unfolded, Garza resisted the invitation to participate in an art show entitled “Our Lives Matter” that would include all people of color.³¹ Her reasoning revolved around efforts by the promoters of this event to erase the origins of the movement, “the labor

and love of three queer Black women.”³² Garza further asserts that dropping “Black” from the identification of whose lives matter fails to acknowledge the source of the movement, erasing Black lives from the undertaking, and dismissing Black contributions.³³

Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi, and Patrisse Cullors created #BlackLivesMatter to speak to the plight of black people, however their political underpinnings are communistic. In a video from 2015, Patrisse Cullor described herself and her co-founders as “trained Marxists.”³⁴ Confirming the position stated by Cullor in 2015, Garza seconded the Marxist position with the following statement in a public appearance in Maine in 2019.

We’re talking about changing how we’ve organized this country, so that we actually can achieve the justice that we are fighting for. I believe we all have work to do to keep dismantling the organizing principle of this society, which creates inequities for everyone, even white people.³⁵

While not apparent at first glance, the underlying principles that form the foundation of BlackLivesMatter have the goal of dismantling the societal structure of this country.³⁶

The assault on American society would include the Evangelical church since the church is an integral part of it. Examples of the woke agenda have appeared in the church in a variety of forms, from adaptations of doctrinal emphasis, as seen in denominations such as

Agenda.”

27 Gonzalez, “Marxism Underpins Black Lives Matter Agenda.”

28 Adina Campbell. “What is Black Lives Matter and what are the aims?” BBC News, June 13, 2021. <https://www.bbc.com/news/explainers-53337780.amp>

29 Campbell, “What is Black Lives Matter and what are the aims?”

30 Alicia Garza, “A Herstory of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement.” *The Feminist Wire*. 2014: 23. <https://thefeministwire.com/2014/10/blacklivesmatter-2/>

31 Garza, “A Herstory of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement,” 25.

32 Garza, “A Herstory of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement,” 25.

33 Garza, “A Herstory of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement,” 25.

34 Campbell, “What is Black Lives Matter and what are the aims?”

35 Garza, “A Herstory of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement,” 24.

36 Mike Gonzalez, “Marxism Underpins Black Lives Matter Agenda.” *The Daily Signal* (2021).

the Nazarene church,³⁷ to studies examining relationships of congregants of different races. One such study examined the formation of racial identity amongst white students. The details of this study are listed below.

Paris and Schoon completed a qualitative study at Bethel University in Minnesota, with 89.4% white, 3.9% black, 3.3% Latinos, 3.2% Asians, and a few Native Americans, and others of two or more races.³⁸ This research focused on racial identity formation in white students.³⁹ The themes were determined from essays where the students were asked to write on the topic of whiteness, written by students who self-identified as both white and evangelical.⁴⁰ Five themes emerged after they were written and graded. These themes were Privilege (73%), Invisibility and Superiority (48%), Isolation (53%), Fear and Silence (33%), and Inescapability (13%).⁴¹

A brief description of these themes is quite revealing. The first theme, Privilege, carries the meaning that being white means receiving unearned social rewards such as automatic respect and class privilege.⁴² Invisibility and Superiority, the second theme, describes the lack of perception of their race, viewing it as normal. This can involve the sense of a lack of culture or belonging.⁴³ One participant in the study mentioned having a level of envy toward her Vietnamese friend's ethnicity because it

gave her a sense of belonging with that group of people.⁴⁴ The third theme discovered was Isolation, indicating the environment in which they were raised with the typical interpersonal relationships being with other whites. Fear and Silence make up the fourth theme, where participants expressed a tendency to remain silent when given opportunity to interact with those of other races due to fear of offending them.⁴⁵ The fifth theme, Inescapability, carries a set of labels a white person neither chooses nor desires.⁴⁶ Whiteness is a label given by society, which has drawn imaginary lines between the races that are impossible for the white person to cross.⁴⁷

The antiracism introduced in this study is an effort to invite white people to critique racism and white privilege and then ask them to act against these concepts.⁴⁸ This critique is a negative task, requiring white people to dismantle their identity without any positive reconstruction suggested.⁴⁹ When faced with this, one position available to white people is that of the "white ally," aligning themselves with oppressed minorities.⁵⁰ Such an alliance puts them "beside" others, as some have defined, moving the white person's focus onto others instead of themselves, being viewed in paternalistic ways, placing minorities in a position of needing the help of white people.⁵¹ When framed in this way, the white person is left without a solution, putting them in a no-win position and the sentiments expressed by

37 "What We Believe," Midsouth District, Nazarene Church, last modified 2024, <https://midsouthnaz.org/>.

38 Jenell W. Paris, and Kristin Schoon, "Antiracism, Pedagogy, and the Development of Affirmative White Identities among Evangelical College Students." *Christian Scholar's Review* 36, no. 3 (2007): 290.

39 Paris, "Antiracism," 291.

40 Paris, "Antiracism," 291-97.

41 Paris, "Antiracism," 291.

42 Paris, "Antiracism," 291.

43 Paris, "Antiracism," 293.

44 Paris, "Antiracism," 293-94.

45 Paris, "Antiracism," 294-95.

46 Paris, "Antiracism," 295-96.

47 Paris, "Antiracism," 295.

48 Paris, "Antiracism," 292.

49 Paris, "Antiracism," 286.

50 Paris, "Antiracism," 286.

51 Paris, "Antiracism," 286.

some white participants included the fear of offending fellow Christians of different races when addressing the issues of racism that separate them.⁵²

At first glance, separating Christians by race as espoused by CRT and the Woke community violates some of the foundational precepts held by the church. These areas of conflict include the equal standing of all who are within the church regardless of race, societal standing, or gender (Gal. 3:28), the unity of the church body (Eph. 4:4; 1 Cor. 12:13,27; Rev. 7:9), and the variety of giftedness amongst the members of the body for the common good (1 Cor. 12:12,14-27).

WOKENESS AND EVANGELICALISM: CONTRAST OF THEOLOGY

The racial tensions addressed by the woke community and CRT that have impacted the Evangelical Church center on foundational theological differences held by the church that CRT has redefined. These two doctrines are the nature of man, and the unity of the body of Christ. To understand the gravity of the effect on the church, a short review of the specific areas of these doctrines will bring clarity to their importance and will show the disruption that this can bring to the church.

Evangelicalism: The nature of man

The important aspects of man's nature upon which to focus are the unity of the human race, and humanity's sin nature. The book of Genesis introduces mankind as a direct creative act of God, creating them in His image (Gen. 1:26-28) and proclaiming His creation as very good (Gen. 1:31). The next chapter of Genesis gives a more detailed description of the creative

process, showing Adam (the first man) being created from the dust of the ground (Gen. 2:7) and Eve being created from one of Adam's ribs (Gen. 2:21-22). These first humans were given the commandment to not eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, warning that to do so would result in death (Gen. 2:16-17). Chapter 3 of Genesis provides a description of the deception by Satan to tempt the first couple to disobey God and eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, introducing sin and death into all of humanity (Gen. 3:1-7). Through Genesis 10, all of mankind is displayed as one people with one language (Gen. 11:1). It is not until Gen. 11:7-8 where God confused their language due to their building the Tower of Babel and scattered them, forming the foundation for the development of different ethnicities. Thus, the human race remains unified, divided by language and ethnicity.

The New Testament continues the concept of one people divided by language and ethnicity by declaring that all have sinned (Rom. 3:23) and that the wages of sin for all is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ (Rom. 6:23). While Paul presents the differences between Jews and Gentiles in the book of Romans (the Jews were given the oracles of God, Rom. 3:2), he asserts that in the end, all are guilty of sin and in need of redemption by Christ.

The early church adopted the view of mankind presented in the Old Testament, as being created in the image of God.⁵³ A major contributor to the understanding of man in the early church was Augustine, who described humanity's possession of God's image as a reflection of the Trinity.⁵⁴ However, according

53 Wayne Grudem and Gregg Allison, *Systematic Theology/Historical Theology Bundle*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004/2011), 2050, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.lopes.idm.oclc.org/lib/gcu/reader.action?docID=5702755&ppg=7>

54 Grudem, and Allison, *Systematic/Historical Theology*,

52 Paris, "Antiracism," 295.

to Augustine, as the first human created, Adam was able not to sin, but not yet not able to sin.⁵⁵ From this position, Adam and Eve exercised their free will and disobeyed God, exhibiting pride by desiring the undue exaltation of being on the same level as God.⁵⁶ Adam's sin plunged the entire human race into sin and therefore death.⁵⁷

Evangelicalism: The unity of the body of Christ

Central to the structure of the church is the unity of the believers who make up the visible church. To offer a definition of church unity, a church's unity is its level of minimizing divisions amongst true believers.⁵⁸ Before Jesus went to the cross, He expressed His desire for the unity of the believers as He prayed for His disciples in John 17. In this prayer, He asked that they be one just as He is one with the Father (vv. 11, 21), that this unity would extend to those who would believe through the disciples (v. 21), that their unity would be an expression of His glory (v. 22), and that they would be perfected, or completed, in unity (v. 23).

Paul continued the theme of the unity of the body of Christ (the church) in several of his epistles. One such example appeared in his epistle to the Ephesians where he exhorted the Ephesians to bear with one another gently and patiently, being careful to keep the Holy Spirit's unity in peace (Eph. 4:2-3). He reminded them that there is one body and one Spirit (v. 4). He then underscored the importance of the unity of

the church by explaining that although there is one body, there are many parts that function in different roles, providing what the body needs for growth and maintenance of the unity of the faith (vv. 11-16).

Historically, the church has been characterized by unity or oneness.⁵⁹ Ironically, as the history of the church unfolded, several divisions emerged, not the least of which was the Reformation, where Martin Luther separated from the Catholic Church as he asserted that the church is an assembly of people who are Christians and holy.⁶⁰ Other reformers followed, such as John Calvin, who distinguished between the "visible" church and the "invisible" church.⁶¹ He explained that the invisible church is comprised of the "elect," or those who are true believers, known by God, but the visible church is a mixture of believers and non-believers.⁶² Since there may be difficulty in distinguishing between true Christians and unsaved people in the church, Calvin encouraged the church to exercise "charitable judgment," expressing the benefit of the doubt toward all those professing Christ.⁶³ While struggling through the centuries of its existence, the church has continued to maintain its commitment to unity as one body of Christ in the face of structural and doctrinal difficulties, as well as societal forces.

CRT: The nature of man

In contrast to the Evangelical model of the unity of humanity, CRT proposes a different

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55 Grudem, and Allison, *Systematic/Historical Theology*, 2083.

56 Grudem, and Allison, *Systematic/Historical Theology*, 2083.

57 Grudem, and Allison, *Systematic/Historical Theology*, 2083.

58 Grudem, and Allison, *Systematic/Historical Theology*, 1057.

59 Grudem, and Allison, *Systematic/Historical Theology*, 2367.

60 Grudem, and Allison, *Systematic/Historical Theology*, 2376.

61 Grudem, and Allison, *Systematic/Historical Theology*, 2376.

62 Grudem, and Allison, *Systematic/Historical Theology*, 2376.

63 Grudem, and Allison, *Systematic/Historical Theology*, 2376.

view. From its Marxist roots, the woke agenda and CRT have established two classes of people, the oppressors, and the oppressed.⁶⁴ White, straight, English-speaking, Christian males are part of the oppressor class.⁶⁵ According to Derrick Bell, CRT founder, racism is permanent.⁶⁶ However, Bell maintains that struggling against racism is worthwhile.⁶⁷ From this position, those who fall into the “White” category are by definition labelled as racist, regardless of an individual’s character or values. Second, those who are not members of the “oppressor” class are permanently assigned to the “oppressed” class regardless of circumstances, abilities, or character.

CRT assumes a fair world could exist, but because the current social system contains defects and abuses of power, this utopia is not possible.⁶⁸ Therefore, the focus of CRT is the gap between the world as it is, and the utopian environment it envisions.⁶⁹ From this, racism seems to have replaced sin as the defining guilt in mankind, and this defining guilt appears to exist only in the category of the oppressors. Therefore, the utopia CRT proposes can only be obtained through human efforts against racism, which is permanent, however, resisting it is deemed “worthwhile.”

CRT: The division of humanity

With the defined division between oppressor and oppressed, CRT has established a clear deviation from the Evangelical position of a unified humanity varied by ethnicity.

64 Gonzalez, “Zombie Marxism.”

65 Rufo, “Critical Race Theory: What It Is and How to Fight It.” 11.

66 Glenn Bracey, “The Spirit of Critical Race Theory.” *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 8 no. 4 (2022): 506

67 Bracey, “The Spirit of Critical Race Theory.” 506.

68 Bracey, “The Spirit of Critical Race Theory.” 507.

69 Bracey, “The Spirit of Critical Race Theory.” 507.

CRT does teach that all people are equal in value and essence and that racism is wrong because of the mistreatment of people who are equally valuable.⁷⁰ However, according to CRT, the permanent status of racism is due to the perpetuation of systemic racism by white people.⁷¹ Therefore, the logical conclusion derived from CRT is that the permanent division between white oppressors and the non-white oppressed victims is maintained by white people. White people must strive against the racism they are preserving, but ultimately there is no solution.

The following chart shows a concise evaluation of the contrasting positions of the doctrine of man as expressed by Evangelicalism and the Woke/CRT movement. (See Table 1 overleaf, p. 116.)

From this chart, the differences between these two systems are evident. The Evangelical church asserts that all of mankind is sinful and in need of the saving grace of Christ. The Church is unified, offering acceptance toward one another even though differences exist. Humanity receives cleansing and forgiveness through faith in Jesus Christ, making the believers one body in Jesus.

In contrast, while CRT asserts that humanity is equal in essence, it is divided into two permanent categories, the oppressors and the oppressed. CRT teaches that the oppressors make up the white race and are responsible for the evil that perpetuates this system, making it permanent. The oppressed, on the other hand, make up those who are non-white, and as such are perpetual victims of the system created by the white people. Consequently, within the Church, the body could be divided into the same oppressor/oppressed system, fracturing

70 Bracey, “The Spirit of Critical Race Theory.” 508.

71 Bracey, “The Spirit of Critical Race Theory.” 508.

	Nature of Man	Humanity	Resolution
Evangelicalism	One race -- sinful	Body of Christ – united even though differences exist.	All have sinned – saved by grace through faith in Christ (Eph. 2:8-9)
Woke/CRT	Equal in essence – divided by systemic racism	Two categories – Oppressor – White privilege/Oppressed – non-white.	None – racism is permanent due to white persistence of system. Resisting racism “worthwhile.”

TABLE 1

the unity of the body and bringing divisions along racial lines.

THE NEED TO EMBRACE THE TRUTH

The question remains as to how the Evangelical Church should address and combat the Wokeness/CRT agenda. The church faces formidable obstacles since the woke influence has seen traction from universities who have implemented diversity initiatives to address systemic racism and other forms of inequity.⁷² These efforts have helped propel the woke movement throughout society and the Evangelical church has fallen prey to this influence since some professors in influential seminaries have been teaching CRT in their

classes.⁷³ The Evangelical church needs a strategy to combat this movement to safeguard the doctrines of the church and fulfill its mission as defined in the New Testament.

To be fair, deviations from biblical teachings are not unique to the church, having occurred from its inception and continuing throughout its history. As recently as the 1960s and 1970s, challenges to the evangelical church have come from individuals who were a part of the church but drifted away. One of these individuals, Jim Wallis, introduced his vision of biblical faith in his book, *Agenda for Biblical People*, where he described biblical faith as subversive. In his book, he maintained that those of non-industrial nations are poor because we are rich, and he asserted that the God of the Bible is for the poor.⁷⁴ Sentiments such as this have lent

72 Shan Sappleton and Doug Adams, “On Decolonizing US Education: Lessons from the Caribbean and South Africa.” *Professional Educator* 45, no. 1 (2022): 43.

73 Basham, *Shepherds for Sale*, 130.

74 Jon Harris, “Social justice goes to church,” Greenville, SC: 2020. Kindle. 21

some momentum to the concepts of wokeness since the emergence of “wokeness” has a pretense of combating injustice.

Because of the extensive influence the church faces, constructing a comprehensive approach speaking to every area of the woke movement would be difficult and mobilizing it would be equally difficult in the different denominations and individual churches. A more practical approach would involve using the revealed word of God in the New Testament to weigh the woke doctrines confronting the church as they are identified. This practice could be initiated from denominations, individual churches, or believers. Admittedly, the understanding of biblical principles can differ drastically amongst believers, churches, and denominations, but when measured against the woke principles, these differences can be easily recognized.

To grasp the size of this challenge, the Evangelical community enjoys both great size and diversity amongst its denominations and individual churches. To give some perspective, one denomination, the Southern Baptist Convention, has more than 50,000 churches.⁷⁵ Accompanying the vast number of Evangelical churches are the variety of interpretations of church doctrine. These variations can be quite extreme, asserting somewhat contradictory understandings of humanity’s relationship with God. Examples such as the difference in theological understanding between Reformed theology, which highlights predestination, and Arminian theology, which highlights God’s conditional election between God’s foreknowledge and man’s free will shows this range.⁷⁶ Other examples include spiritual gifts, details regarding Christ’s return, the timing of

the establishment of Christ’s kingdom, etc. that show the vast array of differing theological views in Evangelical churches. However, one principle shared by all these churches is the unity of the body of Christ. Paul asserts in Ephesians 4:1-6 that there is one body, one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and that we are to keep that unity with patience and love.

Recognizing the differences in Evangelical denominations and individual churches, Evangelicals should be willing to set aside these differences and pursue the challenge of wokeness with a spirit of unity. Each denomination and each individual church will have a level of awareness of this threat and a corresponding idea of the danger wokeness poses. Consequently, there will be a multitude of ideas regarding the necessity of addressing wokeness in their specific church or denomination. Considering the various positions that exist, a good starting point would be the admonition expressed in Micah 6:8, which states,

He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does Yahweh require of you But to do justice, to love lovingkindness, And to walk humbly with your God?

In this prophecy, Micah had delivered a message of both warning and promise to the kingdom of Judah regarding Samaria and Jerusalem. The prophet reminded the people what God wanted from them. Applying the principles of this passage today would serve the Evangelical church well to set aside their differences and confront the menace facing them in strength and humility.

The Evangelical church has been given a prescription for healing in the book of Revelation, written by the Apostle John. From the prison island of Patmos, John wrote the book of Revelation, receiving this message from Jesus. This message not only contains descriptions

75 SBC.net, “Good News for the Whole World.” Southern Baptist Convention: (2024).

76 Zach Windahl, “Sunday.” www.thebrandsunday.com: (2020).

of things to come, but more importantly here, messages to the seven churches listed in chapters 2 and 3 of the book. The churches are identified as lampstands, 7 in number which ties them to two visions, the first vision is found in the book of Zechariah describing one golden lampstand with seven lamps fed by a single source.⁷⁷ The second vision appears in Exodus 25:31-40 of a lampstand with 7 branches that stood between the first and second veil of the tabernacle, symbolizing the witness of God's people to the Gentile people groups.⁷⁸ The areas of error in these seven churches are listed in the table below providing a synopsis of the message Jesus delivered to each of the churches.

THE SEVEN CHURCHES OF REVELATION 2-3

Like the epistles in the New Testament, the messages to these churches contain both praise and rebuke. Many of the areas Jesus pointed out can apply directly to the issues brought into the Evangelical church by the woke movement. (See Table 2 opposite)

Woke pressure within the church

As previously stated, the tenants of wokeness have exerted an almost unstoppable force within the Evangelical church, with some denominations being encouraged to adopt CRT despite warnings against it.⁷⁹ The warning, provided by a pastor in the denomination, included information regarding CRT's Marxist roots and its foundation of unbiblical presuppositions.⁸⁰ These examples underscore

the need for Evangelicals from all groups to combat this insidious doctrine, working to expose and reject it wherever it is found.

Applying John's message to the seven churches in the Revelation, the message to woke pressure corresponds to four of these churches: Ephesus, Thyatira, Sardis, and Laodicea. Like the church in Ephesus which lost its first love, woke pressure has pushed aside the first love of Jesus and replaced it with cold orthodoxy.⁸¹ Following Thyatira's example, false doctrine and teaching have been tolerated but must be rejected.⁸² The church in Sardis needed to awaken and be watchful of what was left of their faith, much like the need of the Evangelical Church today.⁸³ Finally, much like the church in Laodicea, the Evangelical Church today needs to recognize their spiritual bankruptcy and mediocre demeanor, bringing them to realize their need for repentance and a saving relationship with Christ.⁸⁴

The call for evangelical repentance

The efforts to embrace God's children of all races as one body are both biblical and necessary. Before Jesus left, He prayed that we would be one, just as He and the Father are One (John 17:21-23), and His last commandment to His followers was to make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:19). These disciples are then free to gather and worship as they feel led by the Holy Spirit, regardless of race or heritage. Biblical worship can be expressed in a variety of meaningful ways, all designed to bring glory and worship to the risen Savior.

However, the influence from Wokeness/CRT in the Evangelical church is significant,

77 Robert Thomas, *Revelation 1-7: An Exegetical Commentary*, Chicago: Moody Press, Kindle, 1982, 181.

78 Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*, 181.

79 Basham, *Shepherds for Sale*. 129.

80 Basham, *Shepherds for Sale*. 128.

81 Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*. 247.

82 Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*. 365.

83 Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*. 415.

84 Thomas, *Revelation 1-7*. 527.

The Seven Churches of Revelation 2-3			
Church	Praise	Rebuke	Admonition
Ephesus (Rev. 2:1-7)	Rejected evil, false teachers, persevered	Lost first love	Repent or lampstand removed
Smyrna (Rev. 2:8-11)	Faced tribulation. Endured those of synagogue of Satan	None	Be faithful until death and will receive crown of life
Pergamum (Rev. 2:12-17)	Did not deny Jesus's name	Hold to teachings of Balaam, Nicolaitans	Repent or Jesus will make war with them
Thyatira (Rev. 2:18-29)	Accomplishing great deeds	Tolerate Jezebel (sexual immorality, error). Deep things of Satan (secret teachings)	Sickness for those who sin with her, will kill children with pestilence
Sardis (Rev. 3:1-6)	Had a reputation for being alive, but were dead	Needed to wake up and strengthen what remained	If not, Jesus will come like thief in the night
Philadelphia (Rev. 3:7-13)	Commended for their deeds	None	Obedient life kept them from being tested
Laodicea (Rev. 3:14-22)	None	Described as lukewarm. * Thought they were rich and needed nothing, they were poor, blind and naked.	Repentance and zeal were necessary. Jesus stood at the door and knocked. Needed to ask for true faith in Christ in their lives

* This term referred to two springs, one provided hot water, and the other provided cold water. When the water was mixed, the two lost their unique properties and became disgusting.

TABLE 2

bringing division within congregations because of the racial tensions it brings due to the oppressor/oppressed dynamic of CRT. The Evangelical church must repent, not from its implied participation in racial oppression, but from adopting error based on Marxist policies as described above that have attempted to drive a wedge between racial groups within the church. The church (including denominations, individual churches, and individuals) must commit this threat to concerted prayer, making every effort to identify the woke doctrines being advanced. Church leadership should measure these teachings against biblical principles, rejecting those that fall short of clear biblical doctrine, exposing these teachings as error, and confronting them appropriately. The task at hand is enormous and there will be disagreement, but the extent of the adoption of woke doctrine is considerable. Through concerted prayer and adhering to clear biblical teaching, these destructive doctrines can be defeated as the church continues to fulfill the Great Commission.

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:18-20)

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