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**The Great *Awakening***

By  
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## The Great “Awakening”<sup>1</sup>

“Were you to see him in his most violent agitations, you would be apt to think that he was a madman just broke from his chains.”—*Boston Evening Post* on James Davenport, Aug. 2, 1742.

“I’m actually not a fan of the word ‘woke.’ I think the connotation of that means being socially aware, which is a beautiful thing to be. But it does not take into account being self-aware.”—*India Arie*

Most of my historical research has been on The First Great Awakening, an eighteenth-century revival movement that played a major role in shaping the religious and social landscape of early America.<sup>2</sup> This season of revival did much good throughout the American colonies, ushering many souls into the Kingdom of God. But it also did much harm. Some like Jonathan Edwards, who reflected deeply on the Great Awakening, concluded that many, far too many, even of his own converts, blindly rushed into the emotional grand gesturing of the moment, only to fall away in due course.

One of the negatives connected to the Great Awakening was a propensity toward an excessively judgmental spirit. Revivalist preachers (New Lights) in colonial America often called into question the salvation of main-line, non-revivalist ministers (Old Lights). For example, if anyone, including ministers, could not recall a specific time and place of immediate conversion, their faith was suspect.

### James Davenport

Some ministers like James Davenport of Connecticut went to extremes with wild emotional outbursts as well as intemperate accusations against other Christians. This over-the-top emotional criticism earned for some New Light ministers the infamous label “Enthusiast” (from *enthous*, meaning possessed or inspired by a god).

Davenport in particular was of an enthusiast and iconoclastic strain. He promoted public bonfires and told converts to throw anything in the flames that hindered their dedication to God, such as fancy clothes and anti-revivalist books. Iconoclasm—essentially the act of destroying—is nothing new with evangelical enthusiasts. Protestant peasants in reformation Germany destroyed religious icons or anything else that smacked of their past troubles. The sixteenth-century *Bildersturm* of Thomas Munster and the Peasants’ Revolt has repeated its ugly self throughout history in various ways.

During the American Awakening in the spring of 1743, Davenport stood with other congregants at a bonfire built to destroy anything that hindered full dedication to God. He worked

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<sup>1</sup> This article is an adaptation from chapter 5 of my book *Among the Deplorables: Confessions of a Populist Evangelical* (KDP, 2020).

<sup>2</sup> See my *A Cautious Enthusiasm: Mystical Piety and Evangelicalism in Colonial South Carolina* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2013).

himself up into such a religious frenzy that he eventually took off his pants and threw them into the fire as a sign of spiritual dedication. A woman bystander quickly grabbed them out of the fire, threw them in his face, and accused him of insanity. That jolt seemed to snap him into reality and onto the road to normalcy. He later renounced his destructive emotionalism and became a respected minister of the gospel.

None of this is to suggest that the Great Awakening was, overall, characterized by such excesses. But it serves as a sober reminder that even well intentioned movements can get out of hand. A few years after the height of the Awakening even some of the leading ministers like George Whitefield and Gilbert Tennant wrote letters of apology for their ministerial excesses. They eventually came to realize that far too often their religious zeal outran reason and common sense.

### **The Woke Movement**

Today, we are living in the midst of a new Great Awakening of sorts—more specifically the *Woke* movement. This is not a Christian revival as such, but one that clearly bears all the marks of an over-zealous religious awakening. This Great *Awakening*, as I call it, is expanding by leaps and bounds, especially on college campuses (secular and Christian) and in urban areas. It is swiftly finding its way into main street America, and sadly, into evangelical churches.

The term *woke* came to the forefront of the American vocabulary after the 2014 death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. It carried the idea of “being fully aware of systemic racism in America.”<sup>3</sup> To be *woke*, the online *Urban Dictionary* says, is to “get a sudden understanding of what’s really going on and find out you were wrong about much of what you understood to be truth.” In other words, similar to evangelical teaching, a conversion takes place. More specifically, as one contributor noted, the *woke* have “been enlightened” to understand “some politically Progressive ‘truth’ about society...” A humorous definition appears in the same dictionary—*woke* is “a state of perceived intellectual superiority one gains by reading *The Huffington Post*.” In some circles the *woke* experience is slowly mixing in with evangelical teachings on conversion. *Wokeness* is becoming part of the gospel narrative! That is no laughing matter.

More and more evangelicals are connecting the term with a type of religious awakening. Eric Mason writes in his book *Woke Church* that “woke is a word commonly used by those in the black community as a term for being socially aware of issues that have systemic impact.” Mason wants to expand the term “to be used in the context of being awakened from deadened, sinful thinking,” mainly in the context of race relations. To Mason this *wokeness* is amazingly comprehensive. One does not get this “awareness” by history or tradition, but by a comprehensive understanding of “all the issues” whereby one is able to “connect cultural, socio-economic, philosophical, historical, and ethical dots.”<sup>4</sup> Aside from the hubris it takes to think that a mere

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<sup>3</sup> Tom Ascol, “What’s Wrong with Woke?” *Social Justice & the Gospel*, September 11, 2018. <https://statementonsocialjustice.com/articles/whats-wrong-with-woke/>.

<sup>4</sup> Eric Mason, *Woke Church: An Urgent Call for Christians in America to Confront Racism and Injustice* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2018), 25.

mortal can reach an understanding of “all the issues,” to mix that quest in as central to a gospel experience should concern anyone who cares about biblical truth.

The *woke* bombard the non-woke with waves of prejudicial “phobias,” “isms” and other stereo-typical labels. Anyone not in lockstep with their progressive revival may well find themselves on the receiving end of Maoist-like struggle sessions stressing the virtuous ways of *wokeness*. Rare is the day I do not hear someone, both in and outside the church, being attacked with words like racism, sexism, xenophobia, homophobia, Islamophobia, transphobia, white privilege, etc. The trendy twist is to insist that any of these can be conscious or unconscious. So, you can be any or all of these things without even knowing it.

The saturation level of these accusations is so high that the terms are beginning to lose their meaning. Thus, more accusatory terms and concepts are being invented to point out ever-growing societal violations. Norman Pearlstine, an executive editor for the *LA Times* recently said that even the term “looting” now carries “racist connotations.” Dorothy Tucker, president of the National Association of Black Journalists suggested as well that the term “riot” has the same connotation.<sup>5</sup> And of course, we now hear repeatedly that “silence is violence.” All you have to do now to be a racist is mind your own business! The sad part of all this is that by calling out everyone for everything, these *woke* “evangelists” unwittingly minimalize the real problems of human injustice.

This growing disposition has morphed into all corners of the progressive social justice spectrum. The changes (or conversions) that have followed on the heels of this modern revival are striking. I cannot recall seeing deeper and more rapid cultural changes as in the past five years or so, especially involving issues of race, marriage, and gender.

### **Black Lives Matter**

Currently the idea of *wokeness* seems most directly connected with the movement called Black Lives Matter (BLM). Unlike a lot of leftist groups, BLM is up front in what they believe. The co-founder, Patrisse Cullors, has even admitted that she and her colleagues are “trained Marxists.”<sup>6</sup> Oddly enough, Marxism has slaughtered more innocent lives than any other movement in world history. Marxists are not particularly known for thinking that lives—any lives—matter.

Like good Marxists, these “comrades” (a term used liberally in BLM lingo) actively support the widespread destruction of historical monuments of people from the Colonial, Revolutionary, Founding, Antebellum, and Confederate eras. Pretty much anyone that reminds them of early America where slavery existed is a fair target for destruction. As I write this,

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<sup>5</sup> Ryan Foley, “LA Times Executive Editor: The Term ‘Looting’ is Racist, Journalists Becoming Activists is ‘For The Better,’” MRC NewsBusters, June 11, 2020, <https://www.newsbusters.org/blogs/nb/ryan-foley/2020/06/11/la-times-executive-editor-term-looting-racist-journalists-becoming>.

<sup>6</sup> Adam Ford, “Video Surfaces of Black Lives Matter Founder Saying, ‘We are Trained Marxists,’” Disrn, June 20, 2020, <https://disrn.com/news/video-surfaces-of-black-lives-matter-founder-saying-were-trained-marxists>.

hundreds of monuments and statues have been vandalized and/or taken down, often by *woke* mobs: Christopher Columbus, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Andrew Jackson, John C. Calhoun, Jefferson Davis, Robert E. Lee, Abraham Lincoln, and even Frederick Douglass. And, some statues in Europe or others in America from the modern era are coming down for good measure. What is driving this?

This wave came on the wake of George Floyd's senseless killing by a white police officer in Minnesota. Some areas had peaceful protests, but things soon went bad with looting, vandalism, murder, and then a volley of monument destruction. It turned into unmitigated, revolutionary rage, an emotion not unlike what drives the uglier side of religious enthusiasm.

Revolution as religion is nothing new. Theologian Brad Green notes that "the French Revolution was driven by *fundamentally religious* impulses and desires." Granted, they were "idolatrous and godless, but they were nonetheless *religious*." A hallmark of the French Revolution is that it used "Christian imagery and symbolism . . . while perpetuating acts of terror. . . ."<sup>7</sup>

These type protests, laced with religion and religious rhetoric, are prominent today. BLM leader Hawk Newsome said in an interview on national television that "if this country doesn't give us what we want, then we will burn down this system and replace it." Shockingly he couched his violent statement with the following: "I love the Lord and my Lord and savior Jesus Christ. . . ." Jesus is "the most famous black radical revolutionary in history." Hawk concluded with just how religiously radical his "Jesus"-motivated violence could be. "I just want black liberation and black sovereignty, *by any means necessary*."<sup>8</sup>

African American scholar Shelby Steele believes that the principal goal of modern race riots centers on entitlement. He notes that the upheavals following Floyd's death seem to have had no constructive direction beyond "their claims that America is a wretched country—that they must get recourse for what goes on." Mantras like racism and victimhood turn into "we want more—we want the society to give us more—to help us—society is responsible for us. . . ." They then throw in well-worn sayings like "systemic racism," etc., but as Steele notes, "what they're really doing is expanding the territory of 'entitlement'."<sup>9</sup>

When I watch the urban white kids marching, looting, tearing down statues, all in the name of racial justice, I am reminded of Chris Farley's iconic scene in the 1996 comedy *Black Sheep*. Farley's character (Mike Donnelly) is forced on the stage at a rock concert to encourage the young audience to vote for his brother who is running for governor. As he comes to the microphone, the crowd roars with approval. Mesmerized by the moment, he starts blurting out politically correct statements he thinks his audience will like. And the young crowd roars even more. He goes deeper

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<sup>7</sup> Brad Green, "Notes from the Revolution," Reformation21, June 25, 2020, <https://www.reformation21.org/blog/notes-from-the-revolution>.

<sup>8</sup> Victor Garcia, "Black Lives Matter leader states if US 'doesn't give us what we want, then we will burn down this system,'" Fox News, June 24, 2020 (emphasis mine), <https://www.foxnews.com/media/black-lives-matter-leader-burn-down-system>.

<sup>9</sup> Charles Creitz, "Shelby Steele: Claims of 'systemic racism' are 'expanding the territory of entitlement,'" Fox News, June 7, 2020, <https://www.foxnews.com/media/shelby-steele-claims-of-systemic-racism-expanding-the-territory-of-entitlement>.

and deeper, ever more emotional, all the while displaying wild physical contortions as only Chris Farley could do.

You got to FIGHT for your RIGHT to vote! [the crowd roars]  
That's one small step for man, One GIANT... [awkward pause]  
I HAVE A DREAM! [and the crowd roars even louder]  
POWER TO THE PEOPLE!!  
BURN, BABY, BURN!! [now the crowd begins to look a little confused]  
Hey, fellas! [looking off stage at an all-black band waiting in the wings]  
Yeah! KILL WHITEY!!! [dead silence]<sup>10</sup>

In short, what Mike Donnelly intended to accomplish in his emotional foray ended up having the opposite effect. He rushed headlong—based on nothing but supposed approval—into something he knew little about. Subjective action, be it in religion or politics, without objective content and context (i.e., truth, tradition, and history), always ends badly.

### White Guilt

Following Floyd's death in May 2020, a wave of unrelenting rage and violence overtook many large urban centers across the nation. Rage is a part of being *woke*. In Shelby Steele's brilliant study *White Guilt* (2006), he suggests that the principal cause of rage is not what one would expect. In fact, it is just the opposite. Steele analyses the question as to why rage among blacks has gotten worse *even as racism has diminished*.

Anger is acted out by the oppressed only when real weakness is perceived in the oppressor. So anger is never automatic or even inevitable for the oppressed; it is *chosen* when weakness in the oppressor means it will be effective in winning freedom or justice or spoils of some kind. Anger in the oppressed is a response to perceived opportunity, not to injustice. And expressions of anger escalate not with more injustice but with *less* injustice.<sup>11</sup>

Steele rightly uses the term “oppressed,” for indeed blacks were oppressed during most of America's history. He explains how as a 1950s black youth he faced much racial discrimination. And while he admits that racism still exists in the twenty-first century, and always will, Steele believes that systemic racism today is a myth.

But white guilt is not a myth. In fact, it has replaced injustice and oppression due to the over-compensation progressive whites try to make so as not to appear racist. Thus, Steele says, less injustice in this paternalistic form results in more rage. This is the problem of leftist white

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<sup>10</sup> *Black Sheep*, directed by Penelope Spheeris (Paramount, 1996).

<sup>11</sup> Shelby Steele, *White Guilt: How Blacks and Whites Together Destroyed the Promise of the Civil Rights Era* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2007), 20-21.

guilt. *It has replaced White Supremacy as the chief mechanism of control.* By the late 60s, Steele writes, “America had moved out of its long age of white racism and into a new age of white guilt.”<sup>12</sup>

Steele noted in an interview on his book that “since the ‘60s, white Americans have been grappling with the stigma [of racism], trying [to] prove that they are not racist,” that is, “to prove the negative.” This never-ending effort has done incalculable harm. It has conditioned a whole generation of blacks that they are, more than anything else, victims. Blacks are almost never challenged by anyone in authoritative position to take individual responsibility. For example, Steele notes, writing in 2006,

We've never had a President of the United States ask anything of black citizens. And I think the reason for that is they've all felt that if they presume to do that, that they would be stigmatized as racist. They don't feel they have the moral authority to speak to us. And that's, I think, one instance where white guilt has worked against us, because it's important for a nation to speak freely and honestly with all of its citizens.

... I think one of the great mistakes black Americans have made in our long history here in America was to begin, in the mid-60s, to sort of rely on the manipulation of white guilt, the manipulation of this stigma. . . .<sup>13</sup>

Evangelical churches (especially in urban areas) are consumed with white guilt. Radical leftist concepts like Identity Politics, Critical Race Theory, and Intersectionality have made their way from secular universities and law schools to the seminaries, even some of the more conservative seminaries, and finally from *woke* pastors who teach these unbiblical concepts to their congregations. But social justice *wokeness* has a history in Christian circles. In some ways it is a revamping of the old liberal Social Gospel Movement in the United States and Liberation Theology in Latin America. The difference, however, is that neither of these earlier leftist movements were widely accepted by evangelicals. That is no longer the case. Today, more and more evangelicals believe their *wokeness* advances the gospel for the oppressed, but instead, if Shelby Steele is correct, it is actually a subtle control disguised as compassion, and in the long run does more harm than good for race relations.

Progressive white and black evangelicals with a pietistic bent are increasingly caught up in corporate repentance sessions, lamenting over institutional and systemic racism. Sometimes these are actually publicized. Typically, white participants will repent and lament for ancestors who were racist. What few seem to recognize, however, is that these white *woke* evangelicals tend to see themselves as the default *controlling* element in race relations. The psychology of that controlling mechanism shows their assumption that they, not blacks, are in ultimate control of the church's overall direction. They are the missionaries and blacks are the recipients of their compassion. *As whites go, so goes the church.*

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<sup>12</sup> Steele, *White Guilt*, 21.

<sup>13</sup> “‘White Guilt’ and the End of the Civil Rights Era,” NPR: News and Notes, May 5, 2006. <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5385701>.



If there is anything that is systemic, it is the progressive evangelical assumption that blacks are passive recipients of white action. They rarely consider blacks as fully capable, self-directing actors in church life or society at large. Blacks simply cannot make it without white progressive help. White guilt evangelicals cannot seem to free themselves from the paternalistic idea that *whites must lead blacks* to ultimate success in faith and life. This is the dominant if disguised agenda of the Social Justice movement within progressive churches.

One of the most significant studies on slavery in the Antebellum South is Eugene Genovese's Bancroft Prize winning book *Roll, Jordan, Roll* (1974).<sup>14</sup> A central theme in the book is the exposure of slave owner paternalism—the assumed familial oversight, authority, and control of slaves. Most importantly paternalism gave the slave owner a sense of virtue, justifying his control over those he liked to call “my people.”

Many slaves learned how to manipulate paternalism in order to gain levels of autonomy. It is no mistake that Genovese's book has the subtitle *The World the Slaves Made*. Rather than give in to the temptation to passively accept the overtures of paternalism, many slaves used the space paternalism provided to their advantage. They were generally wise to the virtue-craving owners who needed to feel they were somehow just or even positively good in their relations with slaves. Slaves were not buying it. This resolve for self-determination is one of the most compelling stories of heroism in American and even world history.

More and more, African Americans are thankfully seeing through the platitudes of white guilt and coming to the realization that hitching their wagon to this progressive agenda (evangelical or secular) is a losing proposition. Hopefully this trend will continue, and blacks will refuse what one reviewer of Steele's book called “a degrading temptation.”<sup>15</sup>

### **Marriage, Gender, Family**

The BLM movement and other social justice crusades are not just about race and racism. Issues such as marriage, gender, and the nuclear family are on the chopping block. BLM lists several core doctrines on its website. Here is a taste.

- We are self-reflexive and do the work required to dismantle cisgender privilege and uplift Black trans folk, especially Black trans women who continue to be disproportionately impacted by trans-antagonistic violence.
- We disrupt the Western-prescribed nuclear family structure requirement by supporting each other as extended families and "villages" that collectively care for one another, especially our children, to the degree that mothers, parents, and children are comfortable.

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<sup>14</sup> Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York: Vintage Books, 1976).

<sup>15</sup> George F. Will, “White Guilt, Deciphered,” *Newsweek*, June 6, 2006, <https://www.newsweek.com/white-guilt-deciphered-110827>.

- We foster a queer-affirming network. When we gather, we do so with the intention of freeing ourselves from the tight grip of heteronormative thinking, or rather, the belief that all in the world are heterosexual (unless s/he or they disclose otherwise).<sup>16</sup>

Ideas of marriage, family, sexuality, and gender identity have changed more between 2015 and 2021 than in any other period in modern history. During the infamous summer of 2015, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of same sex marriage, altering the most foundational institution of western culture. As recently as 2008, both Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton strongly denied the legitimacy of same-sex marriage, but during their bid for the presidency woke up and believed the opposite. What was believed a few short years ago became heresy, and what was rejected, is now orthodoxy. That is conversion.

Also, in the summer of 2015, we witnessed the Bruce to Caitlyn Jenner transformation. This long and painful episode helped to alter how we view the most fundamental differences between male and female. By June of 2018 the World Health Organization for the first time labeled “gender incongruence” as something other than a mental illness.<sup>17</sup> Thus, that which has long been considered a mental condition is now (without adequate study or consensus) celebrated as normal. That is insanity.

How should Christians respond to all this? The Christian message calls us to be compassionate and caring for all mankind. The church must reach out to all and offer love, but not just any love, love in the context of truth. Sadly, Christians have not always had a good track record of “speaking the truth in love.” By the same token, love without objective truth is not Christian love. It is not compassionate to pretend all is well with those who are caught up in the clutches of mental illness, sin, or both. In the case where it is a matter of sin, the evangelical gospel requires a recognition of personal sinfulness, or else salvation is meaningless. The gospel is only effective for those who know on some level that they are sinners. Hear the Apostle Paul’s assessment.

As it is written: There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one. (Rom. 3:10-12)

Frankly, the universal sinfulness of man is one of the reasons that the mixing of social justice with the gospel is so dangerous. Granted, regeneration and conversion should lead to treating everyone equally. Good works should follow saving faith, but we dare not mix faith alone in Christ alone with good works, be it social justice works or any other works. It is hard to conceive how focusing on social justice as part of the gospel can lead an oppressed person to faith. This

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<sup>16</sup> Blacklivesmatter.com

<sup>17</sup> Ben Pickman and Brandon Griggs, “The World Health Organization Will Stop Classifying Transgender People as Mentally Ill,” CNN Health, June 20, 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/06/20/health/transgender-people-no-longer-considered-mentally-ill-trnd/index.html>.

because the focus will inevitably be on that person as a victim rather than a guilty sinner before God. The mixing of social justice does everything but focus on individual sin and responsibility. Victim or not, everyone must see two things: his/her sinfulness and Christ's sufficiency. Victims of oppression, like everyone else, are still sinners without excuse before God. Salvation is not available to any of us who are unwilling to admit our own individual sinfulness. We are without excuse before a perfectly holy God.

### **John MacArthur and Social Justice**

*Woke* evangelicals are increasingly critical of those who choose not to mix the gospel with social justice mandates. California pastor John MacArthur and some in his circle of influence made a step toward countering this dangerous mix with a measured statement titled "For the Sake of Christ and His Church: The Statement on Social Justice & the Gospel" (2018). This statement seeks to affirm both biblical compassion and gospel purity. The opening paragraph expresses the concern all evangelicals should have.

In view of questionable sociological, psychological, and political theories presently permeating our culture and making inroads into Christ's church, we wish to clarify certain key Christian doctrines and ethical principles prescribed in God's Word. Clarity on these issues will fortify believers and churches to withstand an onslaught of dangerous and false teachings that threaten the gospel, misrepresent Scripture, and lead people away from the grace of God in Jesus Christ.<sup>18</sup>

The document's statement on the gospel itself offers the following timely denial:

WE DENY that anything else, whether works to be performed or opinions to be held, can be added to the gospel without perverting it into another gospel. This also means that implications and applications of the gospel, such as the obligation to live justly in the world, though legitimate and important in their own right, are not definitional components of the gospel.<sup>19</sup>

On the doctrine of salvation, the statement emphasizes "grace alone received through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone"—and then follows with an important denial. "We . . . deny that ethnicity excludes anyone from understanding the gospel, nor does anyone's ethnic or cultural heritage mitigate or remove the duty to repent and believe."

On the role of the church, the statement lays out a powerful denial that should be heeded by progressives and conservatives alike.

WE DENY that political or social activism should be viewed as integral components of the gospel or primary to the mission of the church. Though believers can and should utilize all lawful means that God has providentially established to have some effect on the laws of a society, we deny that

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<sup>18</sup> "For the Sake of Christ and His Church: The Statement on Social Justice & the Gospel," SJ&G, <https://statementonsocialjustice.com/>.

<sup>19</sup> "For the Sake of Christ and His Church."

these activities are either evidence of saving faith or constitute a central part of the church's mission given to her by Jesus Christ, her head.<sup>20</sup>

I would encourage everyone to read this statement in its entirety. It covers sexuality and marriage, race and racism, in my view, with utmost compassion and integrity. While I have some theological disagreements, the statement's overall focus on the extreme danger of enfolded social justice with the gospel could not be clearer.

Reformed Baptist pastor Thabiti Anyabwile criticized the statement. Yet, he could not seem to muster up much in the way of substance, so he resorted to the empty claim that the statement does not adequately define terms.

It is so imprecise in the terms that are used and defining those terms. What exactly is meant by social justice? . . . What are we talking about when we talk about reconciliation or Intersectionality or Critical Race Theory? These are things that are thrown out there that are red meat for one quarter of evangelicalism and might be acceptable parlance, depending on how you define it, in other quarters.<sup>21</sup>

Granted, these terms have nuances that make them elusive and hyper-interpretive. Yet, these are generally understood words regularly used on both sides of the argument. Besides, the statement in question is actually quite careful to define terms through the contexts in which they are given. Are we to believe that when Anyabwile writes or preaches he gives dictionary definitions of all terms used? In all discourse there are reasonable expectations that the reading or listening audience has a general working knowledge of certain terms under discussion.

In this *Christianity Today* sponsored interview, Anyabwile was asked to define these terms since he felt the statement did not do so adequately. He then admitted that he only had a general understanding of them himself! He also said that they mean different things to different people. So how is it that one of his main critiques is the lack of definition when he admits that he is not well versed in the terms himself and that they mean different things to different people? Where does that leave the value of his critique?

Anyabwile defined the term "Intersectionality" as the complexity that all individuals have (i.e., one person can be a man, a white man, teacher, father, son, etc.). He then, as an afterthought, admitted that there are things about Intersectionality that are wrong, but did not explain what he meant. Here is what he did not tell you.

At the core of Intersectionality and Critical Race Theory is a redefinition of man, sin, and salvation. Man, as the theory goes, is the combination of his intersections, with emphasis on whether he is oppressed or the oppressor, and race (i.e., Critical Race Theory) is at the center of

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<sup>20</sup> "For the Sake of Christ and His Church."

<sup>21</sup> CT Editors, "John MacArthur's 'Statement on Social Justice' Is Aggravating Evangelicals," Quick to Listen, CT Podcasts, September, 2018,

<https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2018/september-web-only/john-macarthur-statement-social-justice-gospel-thabiti.html>.

that oppression. Sin happens whenever someone in a “privileged” category such as “whiteness” assumes leadership over others, be it secular or spiritual. Salvation is the liberation from this privileged oppression.<sup>22</sup> It would be hard to find a more heretical and soul damning view of man, sin, and salvation. To mix these ideas into the gospel narrative makes the gospel of none effect. This is what MacArthur and many others are troubled about. So, for Anyabwile to cavalierly smooth over the negative as something not even worth mentioning is troubling to say the least. It is to sidestep the issue altogether.

Anyabwile is stuck in his own philosophical lane and is not willing to honestly engage the deep gospel concerns others have. In the interview he defaults to even more diversionary rejoinders, such as the notion that MacArthur comes from a fundamentalist background and is therefore presumably predisposed to a dogmatic, anti-intellectual analysis. He also questions whether MacArthur would even call himself an evangelical. Anyabwile knows full well that MacArthur is not a fundamentalist and is an evangelical, even if he is frustrated with the evangelical label due to the growing liberalism within its ranks. Unfortunately, this is typical diversionary fare for Anyabwile. One year later in a blog post with the Gospel Coalition, he dismissed a critic by calling him “anti ‘social justice’” but then went on to argue that there was no such thing as a social justice movement within evangelicalism!<sup>23</sup> Again, all in all, Anyabwile’s method of critique is typical of many in the *woke* camp—long on clever rhetorical turns and short on straightforward engagement.

## Conclusion

I started this chapter with the Great Awakening in the eighteenth-century and how some of the worst emotional and mean-spirited elements overlap into the modern *Awakening*. Like the early Awakening, the modern *Awakening* movement has its good and bad elements. Who can deny that we should be just, kind, and respectful to everyone? But the same problems that plagued early revivalist ministers plagues the *woke* as well, namely, over-heated emotion, errant theology, intemperate criticism, and spiritualized diversions. Sitting in the academic ivory tower or standing in the pulpit raining down *woke-isms* and phobias, praying laments on camera for all to see, these actions will make *woke* white evangelicals feel better about their own white guilt and black *woke* evangelicals complicit in this “degrading temptation.” One thing is certain, this *Awakening* will not produce the biblical conversions needed, at least not real and lasting ones. Until the James Davenports among us come to their senses, populist and conservative minded evangelicals have no choice but to try and reason with their emotive brethren, snatch their proverbial pants from the fire, and call them to sanity.

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<sup>22</sup> John Stonestreet, “Modern Ideas of ‘Intersectionality,’ ‘Critical Race Theory’ clash with Bible,” BreakPoint, May 9, 2020, <https://www.nwaonline.com/news/2020/may/09/modern-ideas-of-intersectionality-criti/>.

<sup>23</sup> Thabiti Anyabwile, “Is there an Evangelical ‘Social Justice Movement’?,” The Gospel Coalition [blog], September 3, 2019, <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/thabiti-anyabwile/evangelical-christian-social-justice-movement/>.