Liberty University

School of Music

Woke Religion: Effects of Secularism and Progressive Politics on 21st Century Mainline Churches as Demonstrated Through the Worship and Witness of College-Age Students

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by

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Dissertation Defense Decision

The Dissertation Advisor and Reader have rendered the following decision

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_____X_____   **Full approval to proceed with no proposal revisions.**
The document should be prepared for submission to the Jerry Falwell Library.

_____   **Provisional approval pending cited revisions.**
The student must resubmit the project with cited revisions according to the established timeline.

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The student is being redirected to take MUSC/WRSP 989 again, as minor revisions will not meet the expectations for the research project.

Abstract

This study examines the impact of Woke messages on young adults when delivered in church worship services and at youth events. A mixed methods research approach is employed, with quantitative data collected through an anonymous online survey and qualitative data gathered in a live focus group. The online survey responses and focus group discussion are coded and analyzed, providing a thorough presentation of the perceptions of all participants.

Young adults are the future leaders of the Christian church. With so many churches moving toward welcoming or affirming stances on Woke ideology, the sermons delivered from the pulpit and the topics discussed at youth events impact student understanding and application of Scripture. The development of strong biblical knowledge is essential as students worship and as they witness to others. Pastors and youth leaders need to be aware of the importance they have on the spiritual development of young adults, and churches must retain traditional biblical values to ensure the spiritual growth of their congregations.

Data analysis indicates a significant relationship between church messaging, worshipers' age, and attendance frequency at worship and youth events. This study offers a starting point for further research encompassing broader denominational representation. Additional insight could be gained by examining the effects of public versus private or home-schooled education at the primary and high school levels, as well as the geographical locations of the participants. As the landscape of Woke religion is continuously changing, and academic studies on the impact of this phenomenon are few, there is considerable opportunity for additional research on this topic.

Acknowledgments

God is good. As I began this dissertation journey, I had just been diagnosed with colon cancer. I contemplated quitting but found courage and strength in the Lord to continue the calling that He had placed on my heart. One year later, I have completed my journey and remain cancer-free. To God be the glory!

I want to thank my committee members, Dr. Scott Connell and Dr. Nathan Street. I greatly appreciate the support you provided throughout the process. You both have enriched my life greatly with your guidance and knowledge. I am a stronger researcher because of your efforts.

The completion of this study would not have been possible without the love and support of my husband, David, and the encouragement of my family and friends. I love you all and dedicate this work to you.

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Abbreviations

BLM – Black Lives Matter

CBMW – Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood

CC – Climate Change

CRM – Civil Rights Movement

CRT – Critical Race Theory

GLB – Gay Lesbian Bisexual

GW – Global Warming

HRC – Human Rights Campaign

IPCC – Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

LGBTQ+ – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer + (Alternative Lifestyles)

MFT – Moral Foundation Theory

SGD – Sexual Gender Diversity

TRP – The Reformation Project

WEC – White Evangelical Church

Chapter 1: Introduction

Instructions provide people with the order of steps to achieve a specific outcome. In the same way, Scripture provides the steps for Christians to accomplish the goal of being in the world but not of the world. Jesus cries out to the Father asking that He protect His disciples and all believers and to sanctify them with the truth of His word. Jesus prays over His disciples and offers this plea to the Father in John 17:14-18:

> I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world (English Standard Version).

Christians gather to worship God and receive instruction from His word at weekly church services. Identifying how God's word is being delivered in churches helps to understand how God's truth can sanctify Christians as they live in the world without succumbing to the pressures of the world.

As Christians gather in their houses of worship each week, the world around them seems to be moving toward chaos, and social justice issues are causing division across the country. Disagreements over Critical Race Theory (CRT), Black Lives Matter (BLM), abortion, environmental concerns, and equality rights for those who choose alternative lifestyles are evident on the political stage, in businesses and schools, and the nation's churches. The negative impact of these disagreements is evident in protests and riots that have resulted in the destruction of communities and even the loss of life. Individual Christians face one of three options as they observe these societal changes:

1. They can attempt to isolate themselves, remain faithful to the Word of God and ignore the world, focusing solely on their own promise of salvation in Christ,

2. They can embrace the teachings of this new world order and find ways to adapt previous thinking or seek new interpretations of Scripture to justify acceptance of secular policies, or

3. They can stand firm in their faith, seeking to love others who are walking in disobedience to God's word, yet continue to share biblical truths as commanded in Scripture.

These three options also apply to Christian churches, and the choice that is made impacts how secular messaging is disseminated to the congregation. As these options are considered, church leaders need to understand the effects of including Woke policies in the church. The research conducted for this dissertation highlights the direct impact of the infiltration of Woke religion in the Christian church, and, more specifically, how college-aged students perceive the inclusion of Woke ideology.

The title of this research study is: "Woke Religion: Effects of Secularism and Progressive Politics on 21st Century Mainline Churches as Demonstrated Through the Worship and Witness of College-Age Students." Scripture cautions believers about the dangers of false teaching entering the church. After declaring the power and authority of Scripture, Paul charges Timothy to preach the truth and encourage people to abide by the Word of God. Then he warns Timothy that "a time is coming when people will no longer listen to right teaching. They will follow their own desires and *will look for teachers who will tell them whatever they want to hear*" (2 Tim. 4:3–4, New Living Translation, emphasis added). Church pastors and other leaders who have

adapted their methods and messages to align with the Woke agenda are among those teachers whom Paul is warning of in this passage.

In this chapter, the researcher presents a statement of the problem, the conceptual framework, and the purpose statement for conducting this study. The research questions are presented, as well as a brief explanation of the methodology used, including a description of the research population, a description of the research sample and sampling techniques, and delimitations of the sample resulting from the sampling technique. This study was conducted using a mixed methods approach, and an overview of the instrumentation used to gather data is presented. This chapter further explains the significance of the study, provides definitions of key terms, assumptions, and limitations, as well as a description researcher's qualifications.

Statement of the Problem

As some churches embrace the Woke agenda, the Church is seeing a division among and between its members. Arguments have erupted over Woke issues, especially regarding LGBTQIA+ and the acceptance of homosexuality and gay marriage in the church. These topics, along with other secular issues, are discussed frequently in the media, and discussions of Woke religion are becoming the norm in houses of worship. Churches are grappling over the best way to handle these social concerns, resulting in the dissolution of some churches and the separation of others within denominations. These situations have caused problems with church leadership and the congregations that they serve.

Of great concern is the impact these arguments have on young people who are being influenced by trusted pastors and youth leaders to explore, support, and accept tenets of Woke ideology. College-aged students are the future leaders of the Church and must understand biblical truths as they prepare to lead others in worship and provide a witness to the lost. In

churches where Woke religion is supported, college students are being exposed to teaching that is not biblical, causing them to be led astray. These young people face various challenges in developing an understanding of biblical truth due to the additional external influences from social media and other factors. Individuals raised in the church can search for information about Wokism on the internet, which needs to be balanced by messages presented in the church and in their homes.

While parents have the ultimate responsibility of raising their children in the faith, the church also contributes to the spiritual education of believers. A review of current literature on social issues in the church has resulted almost exclusively in dissertations and journal articles that inject sympathetic support for the inclusion of Woke religion in the church. These documents urge that the church errs on the side of love and acceptance rather than speaking the truth in love with an expectation of repentance and change. The researcher asserts that it is essential to understand how Woke messaging within the church is impacting college-aged students in their worship practices and witness to others. As of this writing, a review of the literature revealed no academic studies that addressed the impact of Woke messaging on young adults. Numerous pastors and theologians have address Woke topics and social justice concerns; however, the lack of sufficient scholarly research creates a significant gap in the literature and the opportunity for new territory to be covered in this study.

Conceptual Framework

Historically, the church has maintained Judeo-Christian values regarding marriage between one man and one woman. In addition, the church has been in agreement with the fact that gender is not fluid, but instead, it is determined by the Creator, and that gender is assigned at the time of conception. Finally, God included diversity in creation, and the imitation of Christ's

love for all people should be evidenced in relationships with others, regardless of race. Maintaining these values, which align with the moral and ethical foundations of Western civilization, a biblical worldview is the foundation for this study, exploring how the church significantly influences the development of moral ethics and the understanding of the truth of Scripture. Knowledge and understanding of biblical truth are necessary for all Christians but are essential for young people whom social media and peer pressure can easily sway. This study explores the policies and values of Woke religion that have infiltrated the Church. In response, many denominations have moved toward adapting the biblical messaging in sermons, including alternative interpretations of Scripture, ultimately removing themselves from the Judeo-Christian values on which the church was built. This research aimed to identify areas where the breakdown of traditional messages is impacting college-aged students.

In this study, numerous Woke issues were presented to participants to gain insight into their views of each topic. These secular issues include: homosexuality, gay marriage, transgenderism, gender fluidity, abortion, BLM, CRT, and environmental concerns. The effect of church teaching and other variables on the worship and witness of college-age youth were explored. These variables include denominational association and church support of Woke ideology, regularity of worship attendance, belief systems of pastors and youth leaders, frequency of Woke-friendly messages delivered in worship and youth activities, and the use of social media by the church and church leaders in disseminating Woke messages. These variables were addressed in survey questions to uncover effectual patterns resulting from embracing Woke culture. These variables were also explored as part of the qualitative analysis portion of the research. The discussion transcripts held during a live focus group of six college-aged students also add insight to the study.

Purpose of the Study

A recent shift in numerous mainline churches has resulted in some denominations employing alternative interpretations of Scripture that put believers at risk of being led astray. The purpose of this mixed methods study is to assess the impact of Woke policies in mainline denominational church worship by exploring the effect of those policies on college-age students. The topics examined include how young adults understand worship and how they have been prepared to witness to people they encounter. The study focuses on students' perceptions regarding the sermons being delivered in worship, discussions held at youth events, and the emphasis on secular issues employed by the students' home churches on social media, websites, and promotional materials. As college-aged students are the church's future leaders, the study aimed to explain the necessity of young adults being taught biblical truths, as it is imperative that they understand and are prepared to share the gospel message as intended in the Word of God.

Brief Description of the Research Process

This study was conducted as a mixed methods approach. The initial phase was designed to seek participation from numerous Christian universities in a widespread survey of college-age students. Although permission was requested from over 15 universities and Christian organizations, only two agreed to participate in the study. A focus group was planned to provide insight from students in a local secular university compared to those from a Christian university. The purpose was to provide more illustrative responses to questions similar to those in the online survey. A local secular university also rejected the request to extend an invitation to participate among their student body, so the focus group consisted entirely of students attending a Christian university.

The survey was designed to provide an opportunity for statistical analysis of the key Woke issues being studied. After administering the survey, participant responses provided a pattern of answers that assisted in interpreting the data and developing more specific questions for the interview phase of the research process. Conducting the focus group interviews allowed for narrative analysis as subjects had the opportunity to provide personal stories about the development of their current stance on Woke religion policies and how it impacts the way they worship and share the gospel message with non-believers. Students in the focus group were encouraged to offer details about their faith development and how it has been affected by the statements and teaching within their home churches. A text-based study was conducted to provide viewpoints from both sides of the Woke religion debate and contribute to the strength of the analysis completed in the mixed methods approach.

<div align="center">Delimitations of the Research</div>

The main delimitation of the research is the size of the proposed sample. According to polling completed by Erin Duffin of *Statista,* "There were approximately 19.6 million college students in the U.S. in 2019, with around 14.5 million enrolled in public colleges and a further 5.14 million students enrolled in private colleges."[1] Compared to the population, the planned sample size for this study is slight. These statistics were recorded in 2019; however, the polling indicates that the number of students enrolling in public and private institutions for secondary education would remain relatively constant in the coming years.[2] Therefore, the number of

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[1] Erin Duffin, "College Enrollment in Public and Private Institutions in the U.S. 1965-2029," *Statista* https://www.statista.com/statistics/183995/us-college-enrollment-and-projections-in-public-and-private-institutions/.

[2] Duffin, "College Enrollment in Public and Private Institutions in the U.S. 1965-2029."

students enrolled in college results in a broad population on which to base this study. Further insights on the research sample used for this study are reviewed in chapter 3.

A second delimitation of the research is that participation was limited to students who have attended worship at least two times per month. Since the purpose of the study was to assess the impact of woke values presented in the church, students who are not practicing Christians would skew the results. Therefore, students who have not attended worship at least two times per month are excluded from the study. These delimitations are addressed further in chapter 3.

Research Questions

This study utilizes a mixed methods approach which requires the formation of research questions that address both quantitative and qualitative analysis. According to Creswell, "A strong mixed methods study should contain the qualitative question, the quantitative question or hypothesis, and a mixed methods question. This configuration is necessary because mixed methods do not rely exclusively on either qualitative or quantitative research, but on *both* forms of inquiry (emphasis original)."[3] For this reason, a central research question was formulated that is supported by several sub-questions, encouraging both quantitative and qualitative responses in the study. The central research question of this study is: As mainline Christian denominational churches adjust messaging and theological belief statements to adopt the progressive values of Woke Religion, in what ways are they impacting the worship and the witness of college-age students? Particular emphasis is placed on providing specificity in the following areas:

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[3] John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2014), 148.

1. Of those churches represented in this study that have shifted their values, what percentage of churches actively preach messages that highlight Woke ideology directly from the pulpit during Sunday worship?

2. With what frequency are messages that highlight Woke ideology being expressed at youth group meetings?

3. In what ways has Woke ideology changed the content of sermons and church messaging?

4. How has Woke ideology impacted students' views of the Word of God?

5. How have students' personal beliefs changed regarding social justice issues?

Definition of Research Population

College-aged students leave home, family, and church and are thrust into an unfamiliar environment and new experiences. In many cases, they are experiencing their first taste of freedom as they navigate their own schedules and take on new responsibilities. This group was selected as the subject of this study for several reasons. First, they are the product of their family values and direct exposure to the spiritual education received in their home churches. Second, they are at the age of susceptibility to peer pressure and social shaming and are vulnerable to friend groups who may not adhere to traditional Christian values. Third, they will choose where they will worship as they take on a new residence at their university, further impacting their spiritual development. Finally, they will be sharing their faith with other students now and, in the future, will be leading our churches, where they will disciple new believers.

The focus of this study is the effect of Woke ideology that has influenced college students during their time attending worship and youth events in their home churches. For this reason, the population sought for the study was young adult Christians aged 18–25, including those currently attending colleges and other evangelical institutions. As participants had to recall

details about messages delivered in their home churches, all participants had to attend worship regularly (at least two times per month) to take part in the study.

Description of Research Sample(s) and Sampling Technique

The proposed research population for this mixed methods study is evangelical Christian college students aged 18–25. Multiple universities were invited to participate in the process, and approval from the Institutional Review Board at universities was sought when requested. Surveys were distributed to students at participating universities, with participants responding to critical topics of the research study. Utilizing inductive and deductive data analysis, the researcher sought to determine where additional insight was needed and adapted questions as needed in the qualitative component of the study, face-to-face interviews, in a panel discussion. The researcher sought permission from local universities for students to participate in the focus group. This allowed the researcher to present open-ended questions that encouraged students to provide more detailed responses to questions posed in the survey.

Delimitations of Samples as a Result of the Sampling Technique

The application of a mixed methods approach to this study resulted in fewer delimitations of the samples, given that responses were sought through different methods. Cluster sampling was utilized, with the researcher identifying universities and other institutions that aligned with the established demographic. Once clusters were determined, random sampling was employed. The sampling technique was voluntary, so the anticipated number of returned surveys was unknown at the start of the study. For the interview phase of the study, snowball sampling was employed, allowing participants to recruit others in the demographic to join the discussion.

Methodological Design (Data Collection Procedures)

This study used a non-experimental mixed methods approach, including a survey and face-to-face interviews within a focus group. Given that students provided personal data, an application was made to the Institutional Review Board to ensure that proper protections were in place for the data collected from the participants.

Participants in the survey reviewed the consent information and had the option of declining to participate by exiting the survey or moving forward with their responses. Those who participated in the survey could also opt out at any point in the survey process. For the focus group, a consent form was presented to students who agreed to participate in the study. The researcher reviewed the document with the students and requested that each person sign the consent form indicating their agreement to participate in the study.

Those taking part in the online survey and the focus group received information about how their data would be used. The survey was distributed online, with results being returned to the researcher and stored securely on a personal computer. The responses to individual interviews and discussions in the focus group were recorded and preserved. Data collected from all instruments were analyzed and incorporated into the study results.

Instrumentation

The instrumentation for the quantitative aspect of this study was an online survey. This tool includes multiple-choice answers for the initial data collection on age, denomination, and church attendance. The Likert Scale was used in more detailed questions, which allowed the participants to respond within a designated range of questions regarding the frequency of messages by pastors and youth leaders. The interview phase employed open-ended questions in a group discussion format, which encouraged more detailed responses. The data from the online

survey was entered into SPSS software for analysis. An online service, DelveTool, was used to load the transcription from the focus group. Responses to questions from the study were coded by topic area prior to analysis.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in calling attention to the teachings that drive young people to the point of misunderstanding Scripture and true worship, which results in a false witness to others. Messages delivered from the pulpit and received by the congregation will ultimately affect their attitudes, actions, and beliefs. These influences become the factors that drives the worship and the witness of those sitting in the pews each week. With college-aged students in line to become the next church leaders, it is vital that they enter ministry with a full knowledge of what the Scripture teaches.

Scripture warns that the end times will be marked by people turning inward, focusing on self, and centering on the pursuit of goals and ideals which bring personal gratification rather than following the truth of God's Word. This focus on individual truth is concerning, as noted by Jon Harris, who states, "If Christians are to retain the authority of Scripture, biblical ethics, and the mission of the church, they will need to reject social justice subjectivity and return to an objective understanding of reality…Yet, this access into reality is not grounded in finite humans themselves, but rather an invariable, absolute, and unchanging God."[4] To address this concern, readers of this study are presented with statistics that seek to identify those who have turned from traditional values and the Words of Scripture due to the infiltration of Woke religion in the

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[4] Jon Harris, *Christianity and Social Justice: Religions in Conflict* (Ann Arbor, MI: Reformation Zion Publishing, 2021), 82-83.

church. Church leaders are then able to assess this impact and take corrective measures to stop the erosion of Christian faith, values, and the authority of Scripture.

The church must stand firmly against political and social policies that emphasize what has been characterized as "tolerance" over truth. They must be willing to speak biblical truth in love, valuing the individuals who have been created in God's image, while at the same time using the Word of God to "teach, rebuke and correct" (2 Tim. 3:16–18, paraphrase). At this moment, the church is at a turning point, and church leaders must decide if they will pursue the holiness of God taught in the Bible and teach others to worship in spirit and truth or if they will accept and support the laws of man by incorporating Woke messaging and values in the church.

Definitions of Key Terms

There are numerous organizations and terms associated with Woke religion. The definitions of key terms provided in this study are derived from scholarly sources and, where possible, the published websites of organizations associated with each term. The definitions provided are not necessarily the views of the researcher but are provided to offer context to the discussions presented in this study.

Black Lives Matter (BLM): Black Lives Matter is an organization that is supported by people of all colors, races, and ethnicities. The BLM movement offers the following definition regarding the birth of the movement:

> #BlackLivesMatter was founded in 2013 in response to the acquittal of Trayvon Martin's murderer. Black Lives Matter Global Network Foundation, Inc. is a global organization in the US, UK, and Canada, whose mission is to eradicate white supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes. By combating and countering acts of violence, creating space for Black imagination and innovation, and centering Black joy, we are winning immediate improvements in our lives.[5]

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[5] "About Black Lives Matter," Black Lives Matter, accessed March 12, 2023, https://blacklivesmatter.com/about/.

In addition to the general information above, the BLM website provides the following statements

to further define their movement:

> We are expansive. We are a collective of liberators who believe in an inclusive and spacious movement. We also believe that in order to win and bring as many people with us along the way, we must move beyond the narrow nationalism that is all too prevalent in Black communities. We must ensure we are building a movement that brings all of us to the front.
>
> We affirm the lives of Black queer and trans folks, disabled folks, undocumented folks, folks with records, women, and all Black lives along the gender spectrum. Our network centers those who have been marginalized within Black liberation movements.
>
> We are working for a world where Black lives are no longer systematically targeted for demise.
>
> We affirm our humanity, our contributions to this society, and our resilience in the face of deadly oppression.
>
> The call for Black lives to matter is a rallying cry for ALL Black lives striving for liberation.[6]

Climate Change: Climate Change is considered a global issue. For this reason, the

definition of Climate Change is provided by the United Nations website on climate action.

> Climate change refers to long-term shifts in temperatures and weather patterns. These shifts may be natural, such as through variations in the solar cycle. But since the 1800s, human activities have been the main driver of climate change, primarily due to burning fossil fuels like coal, oil and gas. Burning fossil fuels generates greenhouse gas emissions that act like a blanket wrapped around the Earth, trapping the sun's heat and raising temperatures. Examples of greenhouse gas emissions that are causing climate change include carbon dioxide and methane. These come from using gasoline for driving a car or coal for heating a building, for example. Clearing land and forests can also release carbon dioxide. Landfills for garbage are a major source of methane emissions. Energy, industry, transport, buildings, agriculture and land use are among the main emitters.[7]

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[6] "About Black Lives Matter."

[7] "What is Climate Change?," United Nations Climate Action: The Science, United Nations, accessed March 12, 2023, https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/what-is-climate-change.

Critical Race Theory (CRT): A definition of CRT is provided by the UCLA Luskin

School of Public Affairs. They offer the following perspective:

> CRT recognizes that racism is engrained in the fabric and system of the American
> society. The individual racist need not exist to note that institutional racism is pervasive
> in the dominant culture. This is the analytical lens that CRT uses in examining existing
> power structures. CRT identifies that these power structures are based on white privilege
> and white supremacy, which perpetuates the marginalization of people of color. CRT also
> rejects the traditions of liberalism and meritocracy. Legal discourse says that the law is
> neutral and colorblind, however, CRT challenges this legal "truth" by examining
> liberalism and meritocracy as a vehicle for self-interest, power, and privilege.[8]

Gender Fluidity: The definition of Gender Fluidity is provided by the Harvard Medical

School.

> Cisgender means a person's gender identity matches the sex—female or male—
> designated on their original birth certificate. Gender fluidity refers to change over time in
> a person's gender expression or gender identity, or both. That change might be in
> expression, but not identity, or in identity, but not expression. Or both expression and
> identity might change together.[9]

Global Warming: The definition of Global Warming is provided by NASA.

> Global warming is the long-term heating of Earth's surface observed since the pre-
> industrial period (between 1850 and 1900) due to human activities, primarily fossil fuel
> burning, which increases heat-trapping greenhouse gas levels in Earth's atmosphere. This
> term is not interchangeable with the term "climate change." Since the pre-industrial
> period, human activities are estimated to have increased Earth's global average
> temperature by about 1 degree Celsius (1.8 degrees Fahrenheit), a number that is
> currently increasing by more than 0.2 degrees Celsius (0.36 degrees Fahrenheit) per
> decade. The current warming trend is unequivocally the result of human activity since the
> 1950s and is proceeding at an unprecedented rate over millennia.[10]

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[8] "What is Critical Race Theory?," UCLA School of Public Affairs, Critical Race Studies, UCLA, https://spacrs.wordpress.com/what-is-critical-race-theory/.

[9] Sabra L. Katz-Wise, Ph.D., "Gender Fluidity: What it Means and Why Support Matters," Harvard Health Publishing, Harvard Medical School, December 3, 2020, https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/gender-fluidity-what-it-means-and-why-support-matters-2020120321544.

[10] "Global Warming vs. Climate Change," NASA Global Climate Change Facts, NASA, accessed March 12, 2023, https://climate.nasa.gov/global-warming-vs-climate-change/.

Green Agenda: The definition of Green Agenda is provided by the Green Agenda organization's website.

> The Green Agenda emphasizes aspects of climate change and global warning as part of "green thinking." Green thinking is responsive to the challenges of our contemporary world and is underpinned by the beliefs found in the four pillars of the green movement around the world: ecological sustainability, social and economic justice, peace and nonviolence, and participatory democracy.[11]

Intersectionality: Intersectionality explores the process by which multiple forms of racism overlap. A formal definition of the term is provided by Sherwood Thompson:

> Our experiences of the social world are shaped by our ethnicity, race, social class, gender identity, sexual orientation, and numerous other facets of social stratification. Some social locations afford privilege (e.g., being white) while others are oppressive (e.g., being poor). These various aspects of social inequality do not operate independently of each other; they interact to create interrelated systems of oppression and domination. The concept of intersectionality refers to how these various aspects of social location 'intersect' to mutually constitute individuals' lived experiences.[12]

LGBTQIA+: an abbreviation for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, intersex, asexual, and more. These terms are used to describe a person's sexual orientation or gender identity.[13] In this paper, the researcher uses the acronyms LGBTQ, LGBTQ+, and LGBTQIA+ interchangeably, noting that this acronym is continuously being updated to include more diverse groups regarding sexual orientation as time has passed. The original designation used in scholarly literature is preserved based on the period in which the text was published.

Transgenderism: The information provided on transgenderism is provided by the Mayo Clinic.

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[11] Carlos Eduardo Morreo, *"Green Agenda: Where Green Ideas Connect,"* accessed March 12, 2023, https://greenagenda.org.au/about/.

[12] Sherwood Thompson, *Encyclopedia of Diversity and Social Justice* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Kindle Edition, 2015), 435.

[13] "What is LGBTQIA+?," *The 40 Years Center,* accessed March 12, 2023, https://gaycenter.org/about/lgbtq/.

The terms "transgender" and "gender diverse" cover a range of gender identities and gender expressions. These terms move past the idea that all people can be classified as only one of two genders—female or male. That idea is called the gender binary. Gender identity is the internal sense of being male, female, neither or some combination of both. Gender expression typically involves how gender identity is shown to the outside world through the way a person looks or acts. Gender expression may include clothing, mannerisms, communication style and interests, among other things. People who are transgender or gender diverse include: those who have a gender identity that differs from the sex assigned to them at birth, those whose gender expression doesn't follow society's norms for the sex assigned to them at birth, and those who identify and express their gender outside of the gender binary.[14]

Woke: This term is often used disparagingly against those in the progressive movement; however, it originated in the 1860s as part of the abolitionist movement under the term "Wide Awake," an anti-slavery movement. According to Madhavankutty Pillai, those in the movement would often target young people to try and win them over to their side of the anti-slavery movement initiated by President Abraham Lincoln.[15] A resurgence of the term was seen one-hundred years later during the Civil Rights Movement. In an interview with Cristina Kim of the BBC Newshour, Dr. Damariye' L. Smith offered a different definition of the term. Smith indicates that the term *woke*, as used in the 1960s, related more to consciousness, stating "consciousness or this idea of staying woke was about Black people, in particular, thinking about and questioning what are the ways in which our government is not necessarily protecting us as citizens, not just in the South, but everywhere."[16] As the term has evolved over time, in this dissertation, the definition of Wokeness is offered by Owen Strachan:

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[14] Mayo Clinic Staff, "Transgender Facts," Healthy Lifestyles: Adult Health, February 14, 2023, https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/transgender-facts/art-20266812.

[15] Madhavankutty Pillai, "A Brief History of Wokeism," *Open,* June 19, 2020, https://openthemagazine.com/cover-story/a-brief-history-of-wokeism/.

[16] Damariye' L. Smith, Ph.D. as quoted in an interview with Cristina Kim, "Let's Talk About it: What Does 'Woke' Actually Mean?," KPBS News, March 11, 2022, https://www.kpbs.org/news/local/2022/03/11/lets-talk-about-it-what-does-woke-actually-mean.

Wokeness is first and foremost a mindset and a posture. The term itself means that one is "awake" to the true nature of the world when so many are asleep. In the most specific terms, this means one sees the comprehensive inequity of our social order and strives to highlight power structures in society that stem from racial privilege.[17]

Assumptions of the Study

As universities were contacted to request permission to recruit their student population and individual students were invited to participate in this study, specific assumptions were identified. Following are the assumptions of the study:

- The sample to be studied is small compared to the substantial number of college-aged students; however, the focus is on utilizing a sample that is believed to be representative of the evangelical college student population.

- It is assumed that the participants in the study were able to recall the frequency of Woke messages delivered from the pulpit at worship or youth gatherings.

- It is assumed that participants in the study answered the questions with integrity to accurately reflect personal beliefs and their experiences within their home churches.

Limitations

There are limitations to the study that also need to be presented. This study focuses on the impression of church leaders and worship practices that have impacted student beliefs and acceptance of woke values. The most significant limitation of the study is the effect of television and other social media on subjects of this demographic, as these types of influences were not considered in the survey. However, some churches utilize social media in their outreach messaging, so those completing the surveys and participating in the interviews allude to how

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[17] Owen Strachan, *Christianity and Wokeness: How the Social Justice Movement is Hijacking the Gospel– and the Way to Stop It* (Washington, DC: Salem Books, 2021), 8.

social media has impacted their beliefs. Other limitations that are not analyzed include strong family values that may guide the students' responses, geographical location of the students' hometowns and churches, and the impacts from adolescent education that may be prevalent for students who are homeschooled or attend a private institution, versus those students who attended public schools.

Qualifications of the Researcher

As a Christian, one who has served in Worship Ministry for over forty years, is a current faculty and staff member at the largest Christian university in the nation, and the mother of four young adult children, the researcher has first-hand knowledge of each of the focal points of this study. The researcher holds advanced degrees in Christian worship, providing the expertise and background of the history of worship, social justice movements, and shifts in worship practices because of awakenings in the church. The insights gained through experience serving in the church and secondary education benefited the researcher as the study was conducted. This section provides information to offer substantive reasons for the researcher as the ideal candidate to uncover issues resulting from Woke policies entering the church.

The researcher accepted Christ at a young age and began leading worship as a teenager. Throughout this time of leadership, the researcher has served in multiple denominations, including Lutheran, Catholic, Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, and Christian Missionary Alliance churches. In these positions in music ministry, the researcher has seen changes to service design, flow, and music that have been influenced by both community and culture. Dramatic shifts in music and various technologies have had both positive and negative impacts on worship. Given the recent modifications in churches because of Woke religion, the changes

experienced in the past pale in comparison to the adjustments in messaging and interpretation of Scripture encountered by denominations choosing to welcome Woke ideologies.

Spending fifteen years on staff in the Methodist Church, the researcher has direct knowledge of the conversations that have occurred in the denomination as the conference has attempted to pacify members from both sides of the LGBTQIA+ argument. It has been divisive and has resulted in the division of many congregations and some churches choosing to part ways from their denominational foundations. The researcher has also witnessed the impact of teaching from the pulpit and in youth group settings where Woke topics were addressed. The push to move beyond tolerance to full acceptance of LGBTQIA+, women's reproductive rights, and other social policies has raised questions from the congregation and confusion for the youth. Once a solid foundation for the Methodist faith, the Bible has become open to wide interpretation. In addition, lyrics from century-old hymns have been rewritten to provide gender-neutral phrases. An emphasis on love and forgiveness without expectation of change has become the norm, devaluing the importance of repentance and change as part of the gospel message. These shifts, however, are not limited to the United Methodist Church and are reflected in the Literature Review.

Finally, as a mother of four young adult children, this researcher has directly observed her children's responses to materials presented by Woke activists. They have struggled to comprehend the Woke statements being made and the Christian foundation on which they were raised. Young people today are inundated with information from social media, teachers, and their circle of friends. As a Christian mother and Worship Director, this researcher's view is that the church must stand firm and make sure that spiritual development is grounded in God's Word.

Conclusion

Christians must not call into question the authority of God's word as presented in the Bible. Scripture offers a clear directive to all Christians to care for the downtrodden and the outcast (Matt. 25:41–46). Christians are also called to enact the Great Commission, "To go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them *to obey everything I have commanded you*" (Matt. 28:19–20, NIV, emphasis added). The gospel of Matthew offers a clear summary of the Christian's role in the world–believers are not to judge, as that is up to God (Matt. 7:1); however, followers of Christ are also cautioned to watch out for wolves who dress in sheep's clothing and enter the church spreading lies (Matt. 7:15). Erwin Lutzer warns all those who are tempted to join the ranks of the new Woke religion: "We must have the courage to both engage the culture and stand against it."[18] Christians must not be afraid to seek the truth and to stand on the inerrant Word of God to end the attractive call of Woke religion in the church. The researcher asserts that the Church must make a reversal to preserve religious freedom, but more importantly, to protect college-aged young adults who are the future leaders of our nation's evangelical churches.

This dissertation provides a thorough review of the current literature on Woke religion, an overview of the methodology used, a presentation of the findings, and the researcher's conclusions based on those findings. While scholarly sources are limited, the literature review contains a discussion from opposing viewpoints. This includes mainly qualitative research written by those who believe Woke ideology should be advanced in the church as well as insight from religious leaders who contend that secular issues should be addressed considering Scripture alone. As this study is based on a biblical worldview, the Literature Review also provides an

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[18] Erwin W. Lutzer, *We Will Not Be Silenced: Responding Courageously to Our Culture's Assault on Christianity* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2020), 261.

overview of pertinent Scriptures that pertain to the research. This information, along with the

Literature Review, is presented in chapter 2.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

In today's political climate, few could deny there is a distinct split in the nation, as people take sides on the perspectives of the liberal left and the conservative right. This discord has not stopped in the halls of government buildings; it has permeated the culture and has even infiltrated the Christian church as leaders seek to analyze the social justice arguments that are pitting believers against one another. Pastors face the challenge of recognizing injustices and admonishing those who participate in wrongdoing while remaining faithful to the Word of God and the message of repentance and forgiveness. People who espouse Woke values seek to influence and persuade others to join the "Church of Woke" by speaking a language that seems to align with the Christian faith. Woke leaders quote Scripture and strive to confuse the truth with misrepresentations and, in some cases, outright lies. This practice has resulted in several denominations and unaffiliated churches compromising previously maintained teachings to embrace the social justice message of Woke ideology affecting the worship and witness of individuals and congregations across the country.

An initial study of this topic indicates that while many individuals have authored texts on the subject, little scholarly research has been completed that assesses the impact of Woke values and messages being delivered from the pulpit and celebrated in the church by church leaders, members, and attendees. Alternatively, there exists some scholarly research in support of tolerance and acceptance of Woke doctrine in the church, which is examined as part of this review. To provide context, a scriptural framework is presented, as well as a brief historical review of the social gospel in the church. Definitions of the Woke movement and key branches of this ideology are explored, along with relevant statistics that indicate the trends of social

justice issues and political activism that are permeating the church. Current literature is examined to offer insight into aspects of Wokism and the implications of accepting Woke tenets in the Christian church.

Scriptural Framework

For Christians, the Bible is the absolute truth of God. As such, a brief overview of key passages of God's Word provides a framework for the problems that are caused by adhering to the Woke agenda. Just as God breathed life into mankind, the Apostle Paul reminds us that "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Tim. 3:16–17, English Standard Version). Knute Larsen reminds the reader that the Bible originated with God, and "Admitting to God's authorship is an acceptance of his authority over every aspect of life. By stating that Scriptures are God-breathed, Paul established the Bible's claim as God's authoritative Word over all people.[1] Larsen expounds on the importance of applying Scripture to grow in the understanding of God's teachings for service of the Lord, citing that "believers must reject all false teachers and their ideas, enduring the difficult days in which they live."[2] The foundational passage in 2 Timothy 3 is followed by the mandate to continue preaching the truth and a warning about falling away: "For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths (2 Tim. 4:3–4). Larsen adds insight, noting, "All truth, whether spiritual or scientific,

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[1] Knute Larson, *Holman New Testament Commentary – 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon* (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2000), 293.

[2] Larson, *Holman New Testament Commentary,* 294.

resides in the nature of God. As such, truth commands either change or sacrifice; it removes excuses and opinions, allowing only for obedience or defiance."[3] According to Larsen, the focus on personal choice results in many people seeking out others who are in agreement rather than encountering the truth of God's Word and striving to obey.[4] Paul's message is evidenced in many people today who no longer seek to elevate God's Word as absolute truth and a guide for living but instead emphasize personal freedoms and "doing what is right in their own eyes" (Judges 21:25). As Christians grapple with the concept of loving God and loving people, which Jesus declared the two most important commandments (Matt. 22:37–40, paraphrase), the Woke agenda is leaning toward the side of loving others as they are, or as they claim to be while setting some truths of Scripture aside. J.C. Ryle offers clarity on this passage, noting that love is born from obedience to God: "We can never really love Him until we are at peace with Him through Christ. When we feel our sins are forgiven, and ourselves reconciled to our holy Maker, then, and not until then, we shall love Him and the spirit of adoption."[5] This commentary by Ryle confirms that while loving others is important, that love is unnatural unless we have first received atonement for sin and continually strive to walk in obedience to the teachings of God.

The shades of gray that are permeating the argument over Woke values lack connection to other key verses in the Word of God. Laying out the path of God's plan to salvation, He created man in his image and woman as his helpmate (male and female) to be "fruitful and multiply" (Gen 1:27–28). Howard Vos notes that the verb *bärä* is used to describe man as God's "special" creation, made in His image:

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[3] Larson, *Holman New Testament Commentary,* 305.

[4] Larson, *Holman New Testament Commentary,* 305.

[5] J. C. Ryle, *Bible Commentary - the Gospel of Matthew* (Balneário Rincão: Grupo Oxigênio Ltda-ME, 2015), 201.

> By nature, man was like God in that he was a personal being possessing self-consciousness, self-determination, and knowledge or intellect. Man's moral likeness consisted of his sinlessness. On the basis of both the moral and natural likeness, many could have fellowship with God. When man sinned, he lost the moral likeness, and fellowship with God was severed.[6]

Vos offers additional insight into the complementary roles of men and women as well as the focus on the union of a man and woman and their responsibility to procreate and "fill the earth."[7] The original sin of man resulted in separation from God (Genesis 3), requiring that a sacrifice be offered to pay the penalty for man's sin. Vos illustrates that due to the extent of Adam and Eve's disobedience, "They now knew evil experientially with all of its attendant guilt, sorrow, shame, and misery. The age of innocence had ended."[8] God's promise that He would send a Savior can be seen throughout the books of the Old Testament, and His promise was fulfilled in the birth, life, and death of Christ, as illustrated throughout the New Testament. Vos connects the judgment of man (Gen. 3:15), commenting:

> The seed of the woman especially points to Christ and His coming to earth (Gal 4:4). Satan would bruise His heel, achieve His crucifixion. But in that crucifixion, He (Christ) would judge Satan (Col. 2:14–15) and rise again, making it possible for believers to triumph over evil forces (Rom. 16:20) and laying the basis on which Christ will ultimately defeat Satan according to the book of Revelation. On the cross, Jesus Christ would pay the price of man's sin and make redemption available for the entire race.[9]

This summary by Vos provides clarity on the existence of original sin, the need for a Savior, and the path by which salvation would occur.

The book of Romans offers the most transparent path to restoring the relationship with the Father. Scripture passages declare the message of salvation, noting that "all have sinned"

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[6] Howard F. Vos, *Genesis—Everyday Bible Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2019), 19.

[7] Vos, *Genesis—Everyday Bible Commentary*, 19.

[8] Vos, *Genesis—Everyday Bible Commentary*, 29.

[9] Vos, *Genesis—Everyday Bible Commentary*, 29.

(Rom. 3:23) and "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6:23), but anyone who "confesses Jesus as Lord" and "believes that God raised him from the dead, shall be saved" (Rom 10:9–10). Craig Keener expands on these passages, remarking on the depth of Paul's conclusion in Rom 3:23, "Those who sin are lost, even if they belong to the chosen people."[10] In Romans 6, Keener emphasizes Paul's warning that "following the passions or illicit desires of the body destined for death" and highlights the "body's susceptibility to following its passions rather than deliberate submission to Christ."[11] Keener underscores the need for transformation defined by Paul, stating that "Wages were not a matter of grace, but of what one deserved. Sin merited death, but God's free gift in Christ was eternal life, the life of the resurrection."[12] Keener suggests there is some salvific analogy to God giving His people the book of the law as outlined in Deuteronomy. However, he reminds that salvation requires more than reciting the law from memory, but a full understanding and belief in the gift of salvation and trust in God's promise of eternal life through Christ.[13] The book of Romans clearly highlights that confessing and believing are the first and most important steps in salvation.

The Christian is offered further insight into this process in Romans 12:1–2, where believers are called to "present themselves as a living and holy sacrifice" and "not conform to the world but be transformed" by the love of God to walk in obedience and align with the will of God. Keener describes this transformation as a renewing of the mind that is no longer serving the flesh but one that desires to imitate Christ.[14] Those who accept, believe, and confess are called to

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[10] Craig S. Keener, *Romans—a New Covenant Commentary* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2009), 54.

[11] Keener, *Romans—a New Covenant Commentary*, 83.

[12] Keener, *Romans—a New Covenant Commentary*, 84.

[13] Keener, *Romans—a New Covenant Commentary*, 126.

[14] Keener, *Romans—a New Covenant Commentary*, 144.

lay aside the old ways and strive to walk in the newness of life, just as Christ instructed the woman accused of adultery to "Go and sin no more" (John 8:11). Scripture clearly emphasizes change as believers grow and understand God's calling on their lives.

Prophecy from the book of Revelation offers the reminder that many who seemed to confess and believe have now walked away, "But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember, therefore, from where you have fallen; repent and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent" (Rev. 2:4–5). James Resseguie offers a simple translation for this passage as a loss of love for God and for one another and calls it a "perilous situation" that requires believers to "remember, repent, and do."[15] He explains that remembrance is necessary to change direction, repentance is required to turn away from undesirable attitudes and desires and take action that will "bear fruit that befits repentance."[16] This "walking away" is also evidenced in I John 2:19, which states, "These people left our churches, but they never really belonged with us; otherwise, they would have stayed with us. When they left, it proved that they did not belong with us" (New Living Translation). Colin Kruse offers commentary on this passage, stating that John is attempting to draw believers back to the truth, as there are antichrists in the world trying to deceive God's children. He provides further insight, noting that those identified as antichrists were once a part of the church but were now focused on deceiving others in the Christian community.[17] According to Kruse, believers have been anointed by God and should resist those

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[15] James L. Resseguie, *The Revelation of John: A Narrative Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2009), 68.

[16] Resseguie, *The Revelation of John,* 69.

[17] Colin G. Kruse, *The Letters of John* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2020), 105.

who have denied Christ and His teachings.[18] These warnings are indeed concerning, yet many churches are transitioning to a direction that is not only tolerant of secular lifestyles but blatantly accepts and embraces the teachings of Woke Religion, especially regarding WR stances on homosexuality, gender, and the concepts of racial segregation versus unity.

Historically, the church has embraced and abided by the words of Scripture, which declares that God created humankind as male and female (Gen. 1:27) and that his design and plan for humanity was for Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply (Gen. 1:28). Further in Genesis, man responds with joy at the creation of woman, noting "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man" (Gen. 2:23). The summation of this section of Scripture is a reminder of God's plan, "Therefore, man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife and they shall become one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW), established in 1987 and founded by Christian leaders, pastors, and theologians, has provided clear instruction on the importance of adhering to God's original design. To refocus the church on scriptural truths on homosexuality, marriage, and gender issues, the CBMW published "The Nashville Statement" in 2017. This document raises concerns about the direction of evangelical Christians on the rejection of God's plan for "human sexuality revealed in Christian Scripture"[19] and states that the church must stand firm in the truth of God's Word, "declaring once again the true story of the world and our place in it particularly as male and female."[20] "The Nashville Statement" speaks to

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[18] Kruse, *The Letters of John,* 111.

[19] The Nashville Statement is a document crafted by The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood that provides a Christian stance on the topics of sexuality, gender, and marriage. The statement includes key articles and supporting Scriptures. This document can be viewed at the CBMW.org website located at the following site: https://cbmw.org/nashville-statement/.

[20] The Nashville Statement.

God's purposeful design and plan for humanity, including the biological differences between male and female, the covenantal aspect of marriage between one man and one woman that allows for natural procreation, the call to resist sinful desires, including same-sex attraction, and the transforming power of God's love to overcome sinful desires. The document further denies the concept of uncertainty regarding gender and that Christian approval of homosexual or transgender lifestyles conflicts with the Christian faith.[21] "The Nashville Statement*"* provides a list of scriptural references to support each article of the document with the sole purpose of reminding Christians to return to and maintain, biblical teachings.

The teaching of Critical Race Theory (CRT) is another key Woke ideology that is emerging in the church yet is antithetical to biblical teaching. Voddie Baucham, author and African American pastor, explains that the premise of Critical Race Theory requires an oppressor (usually white males) and the oppressed (usually people of color).[22] Wes Carpenter expands this key theme, noting that CRT supporters believe that oppression can and does occur, even without the knowledge of the oppressor.[23] This concept is magnified by statements made by Ozlen Sensoy and Robin DiAngelo, claiming that in CRT, "No individual member of the dominant group has to do anything specific to oppress a member of the minoritized group."[24] The emphasis here is that anyone who belongs to the dominant group is an oppressor simply because of their connection to the dominant group. This indicts the entire population for the sins of

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[21] *The Nashville Statement.*

[22] Voddie T. Baucham, Jr., *Fault Lines: The Social Justice Movement and Evangelicalism's Looming Catastrophe* (Washington, DC: Salem Books, 2021), 6.

[23] Wes Carpenter, *Woke Religion: Unmasking the False Gospel of Social Justice* (Greenville, SC: Ambassador International, 2021), 204,

[24] Ozlen Sensoy and Robin DiAngelo, *Is Everyone Really Equal? In Introduction to Key Concepts in Social Justice Education,* 2nd ed. (New York: Teachers College Press, 2012), 62.

individuals within that population. This teaching is in direct opposition to the words of Ezekiel 18:20, which states, "The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself" (New King James Version) Scripture clearly identifies the original sin of Adam as a point of separation from God (Gen 2:17), prompting God to set in motion the chain of events that led to the birth, sinless life, and eventual death of Christ. The Word of God also reminds that even though sin created a divide, "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8, ESV). Christ's death on the cross completes the atoning work for believers who confess, repent, and believe, removing sin "as far as the east is from the west" (Psalm 103:11–12, ESV). Thus, the teaching of CRT decries all white people to acknowledge their sin against the oppressed groups, while the words of Paul in Ephesians 2:14–18 offer the reminder the ransom has been paid and nailed to the cross of Christ:

> For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father (ESV).

Baucham concurs with the words of Paul cited in Ephesians 2 and admonishes Christians to consider that "The Jew-Gentile divide was far more significant than the black-white one. If Christ took care of that on the cross, how much more did He take care of any man-made divisions we face today?"[25] Baucham further reminds believers to abide by the words of Paul in Ephesians 4:31–32 to let go of bitterness, "be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another even as God in Christ forgave you" (ESV). According to Baucham, CRT contradicts the

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[25] Baucham, *Fault Lines, 213.*

clear teaching of God's Word and calls for Christians not to defeat their fellow brothers and

sisters but win them back to solid biblical teachings.[26]

A solid foundation in the truths of Scripture is essential when considering the various

aspects of Woke Religion. Christians must be mindful of the integration of external, secular

dialogue attempting to overshadow God's Word in the Church. Jude 1:3–4 reminds believers to

"contend for the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints. For certain people have crept

in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who

pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ"

(ESV). The editors of Thomas Nelson Publishing provide this introduction to the Book of Jude:

> Fight! Contend! Do battle! When apostasy arises, when false teachers emerge, when the
> truth of God is attacked, it is time to fight for the faith. Only believers who are spiritually
> "in shape" can answer the summons. At the beginning of his letter, Jude focuses on the
> believers' common salvation, but then feels compelled to challenge them to contend for
> the faith. The danger is real. False teachers have crept into the church turning God's
> grace into unbounded license to do as they please. Jude reminds such men of God's past
> dealings with unbelieving Israel, disobedient angels, and wicked Sodom and Gomorrah.
> In the face of such danger Christians should not be caught off guard. The challenge is
> great, but so is the God who is able to keep them from stumbling.[27]

Therefore, Scripture calls for Christians to be aware of false teachings that will enter the church

and be ready to stand firm on the Word of God.

Church leaders and individual believers are responsible for meditating on the Word so

that they understand and can obey its teachings (Joshua 1:8). While there is individual

responsibility to learn and apply the Word of God, those who are called to lead the church have

an added responsibility in sharing biblical truth. Believers who are seeking to grow in their faith

focus on the words of their teacher as they gain insight and understanding of God's word, "A

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[26] Baucham, *Fault Lines, 231.*

[27] Source material from The Holy Bible (New King James Version) 1982; introduction to the Book of Jude
(copyrighted in 2006). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher" (Luke 6:40, ESV). David Guzik explains that just as the disciples followed the words of Christ to become like Him, that Christians "will become like those we follow, so we must decide to choose good teachers to follow."[28] This clarifies the need for teachers to be biblically sound in their exposition of the Word of God. The third chapter of James offers a warning for those who assume the role of teacher, noting, "Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness" (James 3:1, ESV). Guzik asserts that the role of teacher cannot be taken lightly. Guzik supports the words of James with those of Jesus in Luke 12:48, "Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more" (ESV). Guzik posits that the responsibility extends even further, stating, "The words of Jesus and James remind us that being among the teachers in God's church is more than a matter of having natural or even spiritual gifts; there is an additional dimension of appropriate character and right living."[29] Expectations are high for those called to teach. Thus, church leaders must be prepared to lead their flocks with accuracy and integrity.

Historical Overview and Impact of the Social Gospel on the Woke Movement

The Great Awakenings, which began in America in the 1700s and continued with the camp meetings of the 1800s, were a time of significant outreach to the unchurched. The emphasis on evangelism and drawing outsiders into the church was a key objective of preachers and revival leaders. Evangelist Charles Finney (1792–1875) turned the church upside down in

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[28] David Guzik, "Study Guide for Luke 6," *Blue Letter Bible,* accessed March 26, 2023, https://www.blueletterbible.org/comm/guzik_david/study-guide/luke/luke-6.cfm.

[29] David Guzik, "Study Guide for James 3," *Blue Letter Bible*, accessed March 26, 2023, https://www.blueletterbible.org/comm/guzik_david/study-guide/james/james-3.cfm.

the early to mid-1800s, focusing on outreach to the lost. In *The Great Worship Awakening*, author Robb Redman offers the following critical tenants ascribed to Finney's approach to worship:

1. His pragmatic approach emphasized freedom and innovation over tradition.
2. He developed a new way to relate worship to its surrounding culture… embracing popular styles and downplaying the importance of clerical authority.
3. He reversed the relationship between worship and evangelism…evangelism was primary, while worship was a secondary concern.[30]

Noting that Finney embraced the pop culture of his day and desired to reach the outcast and downtrodden, some might argue that his objectives are consistent with the modern-day social gospel of the Woke Movement of the 21st Century. Yet, this comparison falls short when it comes to the goal of the awakenings: evangelizing the lost. Those who participated in the Great Awakening, as well as Finney and others involved in later revivals, maintained the validity of the inerrant Word of God and sought to provide an invitation, or "altar call," as they are now defined, for non-believers to accept Christ as Lord and Savior and the power to change their behavior. Those who ascribe to Woke religion and align themselves with today's social gospel speak about loving everyone and calling for justice for those they determine to be marginalized without a call to repent of sinful practices. In a study about the rights of those who ascribe to alternative lifestyles and gender identity choices, Carol Lautier Woodley contends that white evangelicals seek to maintain power and control over who should be awarded rights and who should not. She offers the following conclusion to this debate:

> Christianity has been a powerful trope of moral rightness in American politics because of the difficulty in challenging the conflation of private faith and civil religion. This conflation melds private notions of moral rectitude with political claims about who deserves to benefit from the rights of citizenship and whose civil discontent deserves

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[30] Robb Redman, *The Great Worship Awakening: Singing a New Song in the Postmodern Church* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2002), 8.

equal protection under the law. In debates over the expansion of civil rights, therefore, it is as much a prescriptive expression of political conviction as of faith in God.[31]

Based on this statement, Wokists are attempting to divert the conversation of faith to a discussion of political affiliation. Erwin Lutzer offers a differing opinion, noting, "The word of hope is that we must relearn what we already know: The church of Jesus Christ was not built on the U.S. Constitution. The church was launched 18 centuries before the Constitution and the Bill of Rights."[32] This view provides a clear separation between *Americanism*, or affiliation with a specific political party and the Christian faith as applied to actions related to the social justice movement.

Woke supporters also have a habit of setting aside portions of Scripture or carefully selecting only verses that suit the Woke narrative. This parsing of the Word, coupled with the pressure to be more tolerant, has resulted in many church leaders giving their support and even joining the Woke-led fight against injustice by preaching the tenets of Woke religion from the pulpit. Scott David Allen provides a basic review of justice as a moral standard or a law, noting that "justice is equated with law-abidingness or lawfulness, and injustice with lawbreaking or lawlessness."[33]Yet, as Allen explains, sometimes, in order to be "just," you must disobey the law, citing the examples of those who violated Nazi law and chose instead to aid Jewish people who were being persecuted, as well as the actions of Martin Luther King, Jr. who chose to

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[31] Carol Lautier-Woodley, "Faith's Queer Pleasures: The Post-Civil Rights Politics of Race, Sexuality, and Christian Identity" (Ph.D. Dissertation, The George Washington University, 2018), 68, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global (Order No. 10827585).

[32] Erwin W. Lutzer, *We Will Not Be Silenced: Responding Courageously to Our Culture's Assault on Christianity* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2020), 64.

[33] Scott David Allen, *Why Social Justice is Not Biblical Justice: An Urgent Appeal to Fellow Christians in a Time of Social Crisis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Credo House Publishers, 2020), 17.

protest racial injustice. King's famous *Letter from a Birmingham Jail,* notes that historically,

there had been many who have disregarded the law to abide by a higher, moral law:

> Of course, there is nothing new about this kind of civil disobedience. It was evidenced sublimely in the refusal of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to obey the laws of Nebuchadnezzar, on the ground that a higher moral law was at stake. It was practiced superbly by the early Christians, who were willing to face hungry lions and the excruciating pain of chopping blocks rather than submit to certain unjust laws of the Roman Empire. To a degree, academic freedom is a reality today because Socrates practiced civil disobedience. In our own nation, the Boston Tea Party represented a massive act of civil disobedience.
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> We should never forget that everything Adolf Hitler did in Germany was "legal" and everything the Hungarian freedom fighters did in Hungary was "illegal." It was "illegal" to aid and comfort a Jew in Hitler's Germany. Even so, I am sure that, had I lived in Germany at the time, I would have aided and comforted my Jewish brothers. If today I lived in a Communist country where certain principles dear to the Christian faith are suppressed, I would openly advocate disobeying that country's antireligious laws.[34]

The depth of this letter cannot be encapsulated in this brief dissertation, but it appears obvious

that King believed in a higher power and called upon the church to stand for justice for the God-

given rights of the "Negro":

> There was a time when the church was very powerful–in the time when the early Christians rejoiced at being deemed worthy to suffer for what they believed. In those days the church was not merely a thermometer that recorded the ideas and principles of popular opinion; it was a thermostat that transformed the mores of society. Whenever the early Christians entered a town, the people in power became disturbed and immediately sought to convict the Christians for being "disturbers of the peace" and "outside agitators." But the Christians pressed on, in the conviction that they were "a colony of heaven," *called to obey God rather than man* [emphasis added]. Small in number, they were big in commitment. They were too God-intoxicated to be "astronomically intimidated." By their effort and example they brought an end to such ancient evils as infanticide and gladiatorial contests. Things are different now. So often the contemporary church is a weak, ineffectual voice with an uncertain sound. So often it is an archdefender of the status quo. Far from being disturbed by the presence of the church, the power structure of the average community is consoled by the church's silent–and often even vocal–sanction of things as they are.

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[34] Martin Luther King, Jr. *Letter from Birmingham Jail,* (16 April 1963), Accessed via University of Pennsylvania African Studies Center, https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html. This letter is printed in full in the Appendix for the benefit of the reader.

Based on this letter, King was calling on the church to fight injustices, not based on man-made

law, but on their obedience to God's law.

In his book, *Why Social Justice is Not Biblical Justice,* author David Allen explains that

an emphasis on God's law equates to what he terms distributive justice:

> Distributive justice is reserved for God-ordained authorities–including parents in the
> home, pastors in the church, and civil authorities in the state. Distributive justice demands
> that authorities render judgments fairly, treating everyone equally before the law, because
> that is how God–the supreme authority in the universe–treats us. He impartially rewards
> good and punishes evil. He does not ignore the sins of any.[35]

According to Allen, distributive justice has been replaced by a new form of justice that seeks to

remove the power from God and those he ordains. He asserts that this new form of justice

emphasizes "obsession with power, oppression, and victimization…a fixation on class, race,

gender, and sexual orientation as defining characteristics of personal identity…hostility toward

Judeo-Christian religion, particularly in its beliefs about family and sexuality…antipathy toward

the natural family…a fixation on redistributing wealth and power by an ever larger state."[36] This

new form of justice should be viewed carefully by Christians as they consider the long-term

objectives of those who believe in Woke religion. In his book, *Christianity and Social Justice:*

Religions in Conflict, Jon Harris provides a clear description of the goal of the Woke church: "In

essence, the good news of the gospel includes a church that functions directly as an engine of

egalitarian social change."[37] Harris further explains that evangelicals who abide by a social

justice platform "articulate mankind's need for the grace of God and the exclusivity of faith in

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[35] Allen, *Why Social Justice is not Biblical Justice*, 23.

[36] Allen, *Why Social Justice is not Biblical Justice*, 44.

[37] Jon Harris, *Christianity and Social Justice: Religions in Conflict* (Ann Arbor, MI: Reformation Zion
Publishing, 2021), 45.

Christ for salvation and yet simultaneously apply His atoning work to individuals, the church,

and impersonal systems through the ability of humans to keep a New Left derived law."[38]

A second aspect of history that has contributed to the social gospel movement occurred in

response to the issues of slavery and the aftermath of events that unfolded before, during, and

after the Civil War. Wendy Deichmann, author of "The Social Gospel as a Grassroots

Movement," offers the following synopsis of the rebirth of the social gospel in the late 1800s:

> The theological emphases of the social gospel movement revolved around commonplace
> understandings of the biblical teachings of Jesus. These include the advent of the
> kingdom of God, the first and second Great Commandments (one must love God above
> all else and one's neighbor as oneself) and the Golden Rule (one should treat others the
> way one would want to be treated). These and similar biblical teachings became
> recognized as hallmarks of the social gospel movement and provided the foundation for
> increasingly widespread, formalized teaching of Christian social ethics.[39]

As with the Awakenings and Camp meetings of the 1700 and 1800s, the initial focus of the

social gospel was faith-based initiatives that emphasized biblical teachings. According to

Deichmann, this movement expanded to impact not only issues of slavery but also unfair labor

and voting laws.[40] This research is validated by Gina Zurlo, who states, "The major thrust of the

movement was the idea that Christians had a responsibility in an industrialized, urbanized, and

rapidly changing world to apply Christian values and ethics to societal problems and work

toward bettering the world for the coming kingdom of God."[41] These important societal issues

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[38] Harris, *Christianity and Social Justice,* 49.

[39] Wendy J. Deichmann, "The Social Gospel as a Grassroots Movement," *Church History* 84, no. 1 (03, 2015): 203-204, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009640715000050.

[40] Deichmann, "The Social Gospel as a Grassroots Movement," 205.

[41] Gina A. Zurlo, "The Social Gospel, Ecumenical Movement, and Christian Sociology: The Institute of Social and Religious Research," *The American Sociologist* 46, no. 2 (2015): 178, http://www.jstor.org/stable/43955625.

relied on Christians to intercede and realign the practices of labor and government to align with Christian values and morals.

In the 1940s, the Civil Rights Movement (CRM) embraced and aligned with the established principles of the Social Gospel. While a detailed overview of the CRM goes beyond the scope of this study, it is important to provide a connection between the CRM and today's Woke ideology. In an article that explores historical aspects of CRM, author Curtis Evans asserts, "Evangelicals were not silent during the tumultuous 1960s. Although they explicitly condemned racism in many of their public writings, they did not support the tactics employed by civil rights leaders to end discrimination against black Americans."[42] Evans shares further historical insights about this issue, noting that while many Christians would not enter the political spectrum to battle racism through legislative means, evangelist Billy Graham challenged segregation at his crusades by removing ropes that separated people by race and encouraged believers to obey the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision of the Supreme Court which declared segregation in schools unconstitutional.[43] Graham's central message to the people was to remain peaceful and move slowly to effect positive changes in race relations. Graham also maintained the impetus of the gospel message that true conversion and acceptance of Christ was the key to overcoming racial strife.[44] Graham and prominent civil rights leader, Martin Luther King, Jr., attempted to forge a partnership to combat racism but failed to significantly impact leading spiritual leaders of the period. King led a valiant effort to end discrimination against

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[42] Curtis Evans, "White Evangelical Protestant Responses to the Civil Rights Movement," *The Harvard Theological Review*, 102, No. 2 (April 2009): 249, https://doiorg.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1017/S0017816009000765.

[43] Evans, "White Evangelical Protestant Responses to the Civil Rights Movement," 253.

[44] Billy Graham, "Evangelism as I See It," *Princeton Seminary Bulletin* (April 1953): 14-16, 20, https://commons.ptsem.edu/id/princetonseminar4641prin-dmd006.

black Americans. While his life tragically ended prematurely, he prepared the foundation for

continued improvement in race relations. According to Evans, King believed "Only an 'invisible,

inner law' would conquer the dark and demonic forces of fear, prejudice, pride, and irrationality

that stood as barriers to a truly integrated society."[45] While King did not publicly declare, as

Graham did, that only those who had been saved could sense this "inner law," both he and

Graham appeared to agree that only those with a changed heart could love others as Christ loved

the world. Allen concurs, offering the following summation:

> Ultimately, injustice isn't a social problem. It is a moral problem. Injustice exists because we are all fallen, sinful, selfish people. The only solution is a personal, heart-level transformation, not just for a particular group of so-called "oppressors," but for everyone. Biblical transformation encompasses both the inward and the outward, the personal and the societal, the regeneration of fallen human hearts and minds and the reformation of society.[46]

Scholars agree that the path to resolving issues of social justice is to transform the heart through

a relationship with Jesus Christ, resulting in believers who desire to live as Christ lived and love

as Christ loved.

Those who affirm the tenets of Woke religion, however, have expanded this focus on

loving others to a different level of social justice. According to Lautier-Woodley, the Civil

Rights Movement and acceptance of people of color in the Christian faith is the precursor to the

LGBT movement—one in which God loves and affirms all people.[47] Woodley expands on this

sentiment by declaring, "LGBT Christians made sense of their right to political equality by

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[45] Evans, "White Evangelical Protestant Responses to the Civil Rights Movement," 261.

[46] Allen, *Why Social Justice is Not Biblical Justice,* 73.

[47] Lautier-Woodley, "Faith's Queer Pleasures," 4-5.

connecting faith and the black civil rights struggle."[48,49] This statement offers insight into the methods employed by Wokists to insert social and political policies into the faith and values of the church. Woke messaging infers that God loves all, and those who choose alternative lifestyles must be represented within a new CRM that demands equality under the law and in the church. Yet, as Lautier-Woodley explains, "The battle to advance a pro-LGBT faith narrative illuminates growing awareness that the civil rights movement was insufficient as a model for LGBT equality for two important reasons: its work was not complete, and African Americans differed enormously in social identity and political opinion."[50] Thus, advancement of the Woke movement can be attributed in part to CRM but has also relied on the collapse of traditional families and values.

A final shift in the historical landscape that stands as an important context for this study is the rise in divorce rates and the breakdown of the family unit. Graham raised concerns about this issue in the 1950s, noting, "The basic unit of any society is the home and when the home breaks, that society is crumbling and disintegrating and is at a point of danger. We have witnessed these statistics: forty years ago, in America one divorce to every thirty marriages, last year one divorce to every four marriages; the home is breaking and crumbling all about us."[51] Historically speaking, divorce rates have increased and decreased. Researcher Stephanie Coontz provides context:

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[48] Lautier-Woodley, "Faith's Queer Pleasures," 163.

[49] In this paper, the use of LGBTQ+ is used to represent the entirety of this community. In some cases, where direct citations are drawn from published works, or where references are made to published works, other representations of the community are used to align with the original author's intentions.

[50] Lautier-Woodley, "Faith's Queer Pleasures," 203.

[51] Graham, "Evangelism as I See It," 13.

> The rapid entry into the labor force [of wives] challenged the internal arrangement of marital roles that had prevailed for more than 100 years. The growing participation of women in the labor force, along with liberalized social values, may have sparked the wave of divorce in the 1970s and 1980s, but the fuel was provided by the rising expectations for happiness and fulfillment in marriage. Divorce rates peaked between 1971 and 1981. Since then, they have fallen slightly, and the marriages of college-educated couples have become somewhat more stable. But part of that stabilization has come from a decline in the rates of marriage.[52]

The widespread acceptance of "no-fault" divorce eased the process of ending marital relationships, as did the newfound ability of women to achieve financial independence and find success and fulfillment outside of the home. Coontz offers additional insight into the effects of this shift on the church, noting that the availability of no-fault divorce resulted in the development of new denominations and religious groups that were more accepting of marriage dissolution. She indicates that as the government and churches relaxed their positions on marriage, "other forms of intimate relationships and child-rearing arrangements came out from underground. . . For better or worse, marriage has been displaced from its pivotal position in personal and social life."[53] The findings offered by Coontz suggest that as the government and the church have loosened regulations and adapted new policies that make it easier for alternative lifestyle choices, people have responded by pushing for even more freedoms, moving them farther away from traditional values and guidelines for families in the words of Scripture.

The concern over the breakdown of the traditional family is noted by other religious scholars as well. R. Albert Mohler asserts that modern Christians do not understand that significant reference to the "mystical union" that is represented in marriage "takes us far beyond the relationship of the husband and wife" and "the delights and disciplines of marriage point to

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[52] Stephanie Coontz, "The Origins of Modern Divorce," *Family Process* 46, No. 1, 2006, 13, https://doi-org.ezproxy.liberty.edu/10.1111/j.1545-5300.2006.00188.x.

[53] Coontz, "The Origins of Modern Divorce," 15.

the purpose for which human beings were made."[54] Mohler speaks about the decay in humanity as people seek their own self-expression and desires rather than striving to serve and honor God. He explains, "As sinners, we are all too concerned with our own pleasures, our own fulfillments, our own priorities, our own conception of marriage as a domestic arrangement. The ultimate purpose of marriage is the greater glory of God; and God is most greatly glorified when his gifts are rightly celebrated and received, and his covenants are rightly honored and pledged."[55] The changes in marriage practices detract from God's plan as set forth in Scripture, and it is incumbent upon Christians to reverse course and return to the biblical view of marriage. Mohler summarizes, "When Christians, under the covenant of marriage, guided by the Holy Spirit, stand upon the unassailable Word of God, they display the beauty of marriage. When Christians build their marriages upon the biblical foundations, they display as the apostle Paul said in Ephesians 5, the mystery of the gospel of Jesus Christ."[56]

The historical, social gospel movement emphasized outreach and the aspiration of Christians to rectify the overreach of capitalistic agencies that used human labor for their own advantage. To this aim, people in the church worked to advance human rights in the public sector. However, in today's social gospel, the reverse is occurring: the emphasis is not on church members reaching out; it is on secular leaders reaching in, attempting to integrate Woke values in the church. At its core, Woke religion strives to convict believers that the social gospel message takes precedence over all other tenets of the faith. In a recent research study, Jonathan Burrows-Branine describes the work of The Reformation Project (TRP), a group that is working

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[54] R. Albert Mohler Jr., *The Gathering Storm: Secularism, Culture, and the Church* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2020), 57.

[55] Mohler, *The Gathering Storm,* 58.

[56] Mohler, *The Gathering Storm,* 71-72.

for social justice changes in the church. Burrows-Branine notes that TRP's goal is to "influence everyday conservative evangelical attitudes, values, and beliefs at the grassroots level to create a foundation for broad social and institutional change."[57] McDaniel and Miller note that while the original movement officially ended 80 years ago, today's Woke movement draws on the same rhetoric, and teachings of the social gospel are still "shaping attitudes."[58]

The pursuit of personal choice, equity, and fairness for all is the key factor, a message which connects the modern Woke movement to Marxism. According to Allen, "Marx's worldview is built on the notion that the world can be divided into two basic categories: evil oppressors and innocent victims."[59] The current social gospel movement seeks to raise up the "innocent victims" in a way that will inspire Christians to respond in love and affirmation. While leaders of Woke religion seek to align with the social gospel message taught by Christ, Michael Vlahos explains, "There is no way to stack the Church of Woke against early Christendom morally and spiritually. This analysis insinuates nothing of the kind. In fact, today's woke religion is a mocking, empty caricature of Christianity, like earlier, Marxist heresies of the last century."[60] Vlahos further compares Woke religion to the Christian movement of 4th century Rome, noting that church leaders of the time recognized "true enforcement cannot be achieved through sanction and punishment alone. True orthodoxy can be secured only through absolute

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[57] Jonathan Burrow-Branine, "Community of Counter-Conduct: Politics and Practices of LGBTQ Christian Activism in Evangelicalism" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Kansas, 2018), 4, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global; Social Science Premium Collection (Order No. 10747163).

[58] Eric L. McDaniel and Kenneth M. Miller, "The Gospel of Reform: The Social Gospel and Health Care Reform Attitudes" *Politics & Religion* 11, no. 2 (06, 2018): 383, https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755048317000797.

[59] Allen, *Why Social Justice is Not Biblical Justice,* 48-49.

[60] Michael Vlahos, "Church of Woke: Next American Religion?" *Humanitas*, The Catholic University of America, Volume XXXIV Nos. 1-2 (2021): 115, https://css.cua.edu/humanitas_journal/church-of-woke/.

erasure of the entire historical memory of civilization itself–so that resistance has no anchor."[61]

Vlahos offers the following summary statement that provides clarity on the goal of Woke religion: "We know the Church of Woke rejects the fundamental sacred postulate of the old American religion—and seeks its destruction. Like early Christians, Wokeists refuse to even enter the Pantheon, let alone be seated there. They plan on tearing it down, perhaps keeping the old temple building as they re-consecrate it with new apostolic statuary."[62] As statues of historical figures are torn down and buildings are defaced across the country in the name of justice and equity, Christians need to be mindful of the attempt to erase history and consider the potential result of the infiltration of this ideology in the church.

<div align="center">Summary of the Social Gospel</div>

The impact of the social gospel in historical movements has been used by many of those involved in Wokism to insert their agenda into the church once again. However, the efforts to influence church leaders and Christian believers to join forces are causing some to relinquish long-standing morals, values, and biblical truths. Joshua Mitchell explains that leaders of the Woke movement are attempting to encourage the melding of identity politics into religious practices.[63] Concurring with Allen, Mitchell asserts that a key tenet of identity politics in the modern view of the social gospel requires that all people must be labeled as either a transgressor

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[61] Vlahos, "Church of Woke: Next American Religion," 120.

[62] Vlahos, "Church of Woke: Next American Religion," 122.

[63] Joshua Mitchell, *American Awakening: Identity Politics and Other Afflictions of Our Time* (New York: Encounter Books, 2020), S23, https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=2355840 &site=ehost-live&scope=site.

or a victim.[64] He provides keen insight into the main departure of the social gospel from

Christian truth:

> Identity politics is not satisfied with the Christian account that there will always be an imbalance of payments that only God can redress through His infinite mercy. Identity politics demands a complete accounting, so that the score can be settled once and for all–or, if it cannot be settled, then held over the head of transgressors like a guillotine, in perpetuity. That is why establishing what one group owes another is central to the identity politics enterprise. The new version of this Christian fixation, however, makes no allowance for the long-standing Christian way of understanding either transgression or innocence–namely, as a relationship first and foremost between God and man. God is nowhere to be found in the identity-politics accounting scheme. Neither is forgiveness, which would erase the score altogether, and leave us with no scores to settle.[65]

Leaders of the Christian church, as well as individual believers, must be mindful to examine the

breadth of the Woke ideology as it compares with Scripture before adopting these teachings.

Current Definitions of Woke and Key Branches of Wokism

Wokism encompasses a broad spectrum of social movements that have grown

increasingly powerful in the United States and have also been impacting the Christian church. In

this section, specific terminology of the Woke movement will be explored, as well as details of

the various branches or movements within the social justice movements that constitute Wokism.

Supporters of Woke ideology, such as Lautier-Woodley, assert that Christians have long sought

to "justify various kinds of social power—whether to maintain power over others or to shift

existing power in favor of those on the margins of society."[66] Lautier-Woodley claims that

Christians misrepresent the gospel by citing that a "relationship with Jesus Christ is the only

answer to social problems" and that "proponents of the social gospel have interpreted the life and

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[64] Mitchell, *American Awakening,* S8.

[65] Mitchell, *American Awakening,* S8.

[66] Lautier-Woodley, "Faith's Queer Pleasures," 68.

ministry of Jesus as an indictment of Christian and political figures who oppress the poor and powerless."[67] This statement explains the underlying tenet of each branch of Wokism: the identification by Woke leaders of people in society whom they deem as victims or suffering from injustice caused, at least in part, by the church's commitment to the Scripture.

Historically, proponents of the social gospel have fought for the rights of enslaved people, women, and children, which has resulted in historic and necessary changes in society to protect basic human rights as guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution. The modern Woke movement, however, seeks to expand control beyond the governmental rights of citizens to impact the biblical teachings of the Christian faith. The new Woke religion seeks to pressure Christians to align with policies that allow abortion on demand "my body, my choice," imply that gender is fluid and determined by individuals, and that those who choose alternative lifestyles as represented by the LGBTQ+ movement must enjoy full inclusion into the church, including the right to marry and serve in leadership positions. They further espouse that white supremacy is rampant in society and implore the adoption of messages in support of Black Lives Matter and Critical Race Theory. Another aspect of Wokism that attracts people of all ages and walks of life is the emphasis on the environment, as evidenced in the "Green Agenda." Each of these branches of Woke Religion will be explored in detail in this study. As churches yield to these tenets of Woke ideology, this shift is negatively affecting church attendance and membership in addition to the church's Biblical conviction and Christian witness in the world.

Relevant Statistics

As the scriptural framework and historical perspectives help shape this study's focus, a review of statistical data also provides key insights into the shift that has occurred in several

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[67] Lautier-Woodley," Faith's Queer Pleasures," 65.

denominational churches in the past decade regarding the Woke agenda, specifically on the topic

of LGBTQ+. This information provides insight into church denominations that have shifted their

perspectives and adopted messaging reflective of Woke values. The Human Rights Campaign

(HRC), is an organization that strives to promote equal rights for those who identify as LGBTQ

and provides information on mainline denominational churches that have adapted their

messaging to be aligned with the LGBTQ movement. HRC presents the following statements to

make visitors to their site aware of which churches are amenable to LGBTQ inclusion.[68]

> **United Church of Christ:** As early as 1969, the UCC voiced its commitment to civil rights for LGBTQ people. In 1975, the General Synod passed resolutions denouncing discrimination based in "affectional or sexual preference." By 2005, the Synod had passed a resolution that called "for an end to rhetoric that fuels hostility, misunderstanding, fear and hatred expressed toward gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons.

> **Episcopal Church (USA):** In 1976, both the House of Deputies and House of Bishops voted for a fully inclusive Episcopal Church, stating, "homosexual persons are children of God who have a full and equal claim with all other persons upon the love, acceptance, and pastoral concern and care of the church." Canon law includes "gender identity or expression" in its list of persons who are assured full access to the ministry of the church. The law further specifies that administrative forms must include options for both preferred and legal names, and for gender identity and pronoun preference. In an intentional move toward diversity, it adds, "As transgender people and their families increasingly come out within or find their way to congregations, their specific naming in our Canons . . . will encourage congregations to deepen their understanding and widen their welcome."

> **Evangelical Lutheran Church (USA):** In 1991, the Churchwide Assembly passed a resolution stating that, "Gay and lesbian people, as individuals created by God, are welcome to participate fully in the life of the congregations of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America." Today, church programs include summer camps and homeless shelters for LGBTQ+ youth, and pastor participation in the "It Gets Better" campaign. Both Sexual Orientation & Gender Identity have been included in their 'Human Sexuality: Gift and Trust' Social Statement. Social Statements set policy for the ELCA and guide its advocacy and work as a publicly engaged church.

> **Presbyterian Church (USA):** In 2018, the 223rd General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (USA) voted to affirm its commitment to the full welcome, acceptance, and

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68 "Stances of Faith on LGBTQ Issues" Human Rights Campaign, accessed August 2022, https://www.hrc.org/search?production_hrcSearch%5Bquery%5D=stances%20on%20LGBTQ.

inclusion of transgender people, people who identify as gender non-binary, and people of all gender identities within the full life of the church and the world. It went further to lament the ways that the policies and actions of the PC(USA) have caused gifted, faithful, LGBTQIA+ Christians to leave the Presbyterian church so that they could find a more welcoming place to serve, as they have been gifted and called by the Spirit.

In a newsletter published online by Evangelical Focus/Europe, these churches that have adopted LGBTQ-friendly policies as part of the Woke movement have experienced an "accelerated loss of their membership"[69] since instituting the new ideologies. Statistics indicate that the United Church of Christ has experienced a decline of nearly two-thirds of its membership, while the Episcopal Church of the USA, Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, and the Presbyterian Church USA have lost one-third of their membership.[70] While the statistics cannot precisely demonstrate that acceptance of LGBTQ+ ideology has caused the decline, it can be asserted that the choices made by these denominations have not improved their overall membership numbers. According to a poll by Gallup, numbers in Woke-friendly churches show a higher rate of decline than all churches combined: "On average, 69% of U.S. adults were members of a church in 1998-2000, compared with 52% in 2016-2018."[71] These numbers indicate a 17% decline in church membership and attendance versus the 33 to 66% decline for churches that have adopted Woke ideology.

In addition to the churches listed above, the United Methodist Church, at the time of the research, continues to debate the path they will follow regarding LGBTQ+ in the church, with mentions of a split within the church to allow traditional churches to break away from the

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[69] "The Sinking 'LGBT' Inclusive Protestant Churches" *Evangelical Focus-Europe* (25 April 2022): 3-4, https://evangelicalfocus.com/features/12757/inclusive-protestant-churches-are-sinking.

[70] "The Sinking 'LGBT' Inclusive Protestant Churches."

[71] Jeffrey M. Jones, "U.S. Church Membership Down Sharply in Past Two Decades" *Gallup Politics,* April 18, 2019, https://news.gallup.com/poll/248837/church-membership-down-sharply-past-two-decades.aspx.

denomination.[72] According to a recent report, "The United Methodist Church lost over 1,800 congregations in 2022, mainly due to the denomination's ongoing schism over homosexuality."[73] While many churches have adapted their views of tolerance on this aspect of Wokism, the Southern Baptist Convention (as of the time of this research) and a few others have remained steadfast in their traditional stance on the creation of male and female and that marriage should only be ordained as being between one woman and one man.

Impact of the Equality Act

As churches wrestle with the decisions to adopt elements of Woke religion, a key consideration is pending legislation entitled the Equality Act. According to Mary Beth Waddell of the Family Research Council, The Equality Act would be detrimental to religious freedoms, noting that it "would mandate government-imposed inequality and unfairness by requiring acceptance of a particular ideology about sexual ethics, while leaving no room for differing opinions and legitimate public debate. Simply put, the Equality Act mandates an anti-life, anti-family, and anti-faith agenda throughout federal law and would be a disaster for all Americans."[74]

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[72] "United Methodist Traditionalists, Centrists, Progressives & Bishops Sign Agreement Aimed at Separation," *Council of Bishops,* January 2, 2020, https://www.unitedmethodistbishops.org/newsdetail/united-methodist-traditionalists-centrists-progressives-bishops-sign-agreement-aimed-at-separation-13133654.

[73] Michael Gyboski, "Over 1,800 Churches Left United Methodist Church in 2022," *The Christian Post* January 27, 2023, https://www.christianpost.com/news/over-1800-churches-left-united-methodist-church-report.html.

[74] Mary Beth Waddell, "How the Equality Act is Actually Unequal, Unfair, and Unjust," Family Research Council Issue Brief (February 2021): 2, https://www.frc.org/get.cfm?i=IF19D01.

The Equality Act is an important legislation for Christians, as it has the potential to exact changes in the way that churches function. Known as H.R.5, the Equality Act includes the following language:

> This bill prohibits discrimination based on sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity in areas including public accommodations and facilities, education, federal funding, employment, housing, credit, and the jury system. Specifically, the bill defines and includes sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity among the prohibited categories of discrimination or segregation.
>
> The bill expands the definition of public accommodations to include places or establishments that provide (1) exhibitions, recreation, exercise, amusement, gatherings, or displays; (2) goods, services, or programs; and (3) transportation services.
>
> The bill allows the Department of Justice to intervene in equal protection actions in federal court on account of sexual orientation or gender identity.
>
> The bill prohibits an individual from being denied access to a shared facility, including a restroom, a locker room, and a dressing room, that is in accordance with the individual's gender identity.[75]

As churches open their doors to hold worship services and offer other gatherings and events in their communities, they are considered "public accommodations" and, therefore, will be required to abide by the stipulations outlined in H.R.5. David Closson of the Family Research Council offers a historical context of religious freedoms promised in the First Amendment. Speaking of H.R.5, he explains, "The Equality Act undermines that freedom by gutting existing religious liberty protections and coercing acceptance of a new orthodoxy."[76] The Equality Act passed the 117th Congress on February 25, 2021, but has yet to be debated in the United States Senate. This legislation, if passed, will force all houses of worship to comply with regulations such as allowing transgendered people to use the restroom of their choice, limiting sex-specific

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[75] H.R.5—Equality Act, https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/5.

[76] David Closson, TH.M., "A Biblical Rebuke of the Equality Act, Standing for Freedom Center, April 8, 2021, https://www.standingforfreedom.com/2021/04/a-biblical-rebuke-of-the-equality-act/.

gatherings such as women's prayer circles or men's sports leagues, and forcing churches to hire staff (non-pastoral) regardless of their views on life, sexuality, and marriage.[77] Therefore, as religious leaders consider the integration of Woke policies into their churches, pastors and their congregations must consider the effect that the Equality Act will have on the life of the church.

Importance of this Study and Gap in the Literature on Woke Topics

Research of scholarly sources on the topic of Woke religion resulted mainly in articles and dissertations that affirm the acceptance of Wokism in the church. This study explores unchartered ground as it provides an alternative viewpoint that examines the effect of Woke ideology in the church with specific application to college-aged believers. While there is a lack of scholarly journal articles and dissertations that discuss the effects of Woke Religion, in this section, a review of current literature that affirms Woke ideology is analyzed and compared to crucial texts written by scholarly experts and pastors. Several books are highlighted in this section to provide further context for the discussion of the Woke movement and how it impacts individual believers and the Christian church. This analysis is separated into discussions on the topics of Identity and Intersectionality, LGBTQ+ Inclusion, Black Lives Matter, Critical Race Theory, Abortion, and the green agenda, all key facets of Woke religion.

Identity and Intersectionality

The topic of sexual identity and the broader element of intersectionality are key aspects of Woke Religion. The focus on the ability of individuals to choose their own gender exhibits similarities to postmodernism. The philosophy of the postmodern movement denies absolute truth, as explained by David F. Wells in his description of the "postmodern mind":

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[77] Closson, "A Biblical Rebuke."

> It is one that fits this new world as a hand fits a glove. It has neither moral absolutes nor any understanding of truth. Its posture is ironic detachment. It neither embraces any position nor yet finally rejects any. Its byword is "whatever." It looks on the world blankly, for the world has become resplendent with bright, fast-moving experiences that are nevertheless empty of meaning.[78]

In a discussion of sexual identity and intersectionality, the current literature indicates opposing perspectives, with one side leaning toward postmodernism and the other holding on to traditional definitions of sex and gender. In "Why is Sex such a Big (Moral) Deal? Psychological Barriers to Constructive Dialogue on Sexual and Gender Diversity in Christian Communities," Heather Looy explores the discussion of sex and gender identity from both sides of the discussion. She notes those who lean left value the freedom of choice, while those on the right may desire to honor that freedom; they also "raise questions about the naturalness and normality of minority forms of SGD (sexual and gender diversity), whether changes in marriage laws or granting freedom to modify bodies to fit gender identity flout God's intentions and ideals, and whether redefining gender, sexuality, and marriage will undermine social stability."[79] According to Looy, humans are trained to unconsciously identify people as either male or female and cautions that this system of classification is "so swift and unconscious, our perceptions seem objective. They do not feel like a construction or a biased selection and interpretation of the person's traits."[80] She notes that while people describe others by race, hair, color, and other characteristics, the implications of gender challenge the Christian belief that God "created them male and female" (Gen. 1:26) and that "For many Christians, a challenge to this binary challenges their self-

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[78] David F. Wells, *The Courage to be Protestant: Reformation Faith in Today's World* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2017), 32-33.

[79] Heather Looy, "Why is Sex such a Big (Moral) Deal? Psychological Barriers to Constructive Dialogue on Sexual and Gender Diversity in Christian Communities" *Social Justice Research* 31, no. 3 (09, 2018): 297, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11211-018-0315-8.

[80] Looy, "Why is Sex Such a Big (Moral) Deal," 294.

identity, their understanding of how the social and natural worlds are structured, and their beliefs about God and God's intentions."[81] This can be unsettling to Christians as they grapple with the Woke policies on equality and belief in Scripture.

Looy approaches the topic of identity through the lens of the moral foundation theory (MFT), which was established by socialists and psychologists to study the effects of culture on morality. Key themes of the moral foundation theory include care/harm, fairness/cheating, loyalty/betrayal, authority/subversion, sanctity/degradation, and liberty/oppression.[82] Leading MFT theorists believe that "liberals try to create a morality relying primarily on the Care/harm foundation, with additional support from the Fairness/cheating and Liberty/oppression foundations. Conservatives, especially religious conservatives, use all six foundations, including Loyalty/betrayal, Authority/subversion, and Sanctity/degradation."[83] Lautier-Woodley agrees with the findings of MFT, noting her study reveals "an intersectional theory of Christian Identity might lead to more sophisticated analysis of faith-based activism and the political implications of Christians equating their beliefs about race, gender, and sexuality with God's will for the United States."[84] Further, Lautier-Woodley raises concerns that this results in the dominant evangelical community attempting to silence "the voices of believers on the margins of the tradition."[85] Proponents of MFT and Woke Religion have leveraged these concerns to garner support for freedom of choice in sex and gender identity. They align with groups determined to be

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[81] Looy, "Why is Sex Such a Big (Moral) Deal," 294-95.

[82] Insights on Moral Foundation Theory are shared at https://moralfoundations.org/.

[83] Moral Foundation Theory.

[84] Lautier-Woodley, "Faith's Queer Pleasures," 207.

[85] Lautier-Woodley, "Faith's Queer Pleasures," 207.

marginalized and defined by their intersectionality. The primary focus is to reach beyond governmental policies into facets of everyday life for all people, including the insertion of MFT and Woke religious beliefs into the church.

Erwin W. Lutzer examines the initial movement of Woke religion, offering a thorough discussion on the methods being used by those on the Left to divide and conquer the Christian church as part of their goal for SGD rights. In his book, *We Will Not Be Silenced,* Lutzer identifies how Wokism is entering schools, homes, businesses, and churches under the guise of equality. Lutzer concurs that God is the Father of diversity. He states that Christians should love others and that refusing to do so "denies the inherent dignity of all persons."[86] He agrees with the premise of "equal value" that all people have before God and the necessity of providing the constitutional rights of all people. Yet, Lutzer raises concerns about applying a broad definition of equity to aspects of human life that are not evidenced in Scripture, including same-sex marriage, healthcare/reproduction rights (free healthcare/abortion), financial income (socialism), and personal selection of gender (transgenderism).[87] Lutzer asserts that the thrust of the Woke movement lies in rewriting the original meaning of words such as equality and the broader values of our nation's history. He raises concerns that "once the past has been destroyed, we can expect that a new culture and a new history will emerge. We will forget who we once were. And who we are."[88]

Owen Strachan also addresses issues connected to intersectionality. He explains that Woke ideology aligns with the teachings of Karl Marx, which seeks to cause division, not create

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[86] Lutzer, *We Will Not Be Silenced,* 73.

[87] Lutzer, *We Will Not Be Silenced,* 75.

[88] Lutzer, *We Will Not Be Silenced,* 47.

unity. Woke ideologues select those whom they label as *oppressed*, and anyone who does not

agree with them is labeled an *oppressor*. Just as the teaching of white supremacy does not align

with Scripture, Strachan states that intersectionality also denies the truth of God's Word,

asserting that in Woke religion, "Liberation is not found in any theological solution, but through

identification of the oppression–often hidden–that society transmits."[89] While the Woke agenda

focuses on division, Scripture reminds that God created only one human race. Yet, Strachan

points out, "oneness is not sameness."[90] God's design is perfect and purposeful; however,

according to Strachan, in Woke religion: "There is no divine design in wokeness, there is only

one's personal identity, following one's own heart, and expecting others to affirm one's chosen

path. This is what love is in wokeness: not transformation, but affirmation."[91] Throughout the

text, Strachan continues to demonstrate significant differences such as this, offering Christians

the opportunity to ascertain exactly how the teachings of Woke religion directly oppose the

teachings of the Bible.

<div align="center">LGBTQ+ Inclusion</div>

LGBTQ+ inclusion is one of the key areas where the teachings of Woke Religion are

entering the church. Proponents of alternative lifestyles assert that one does not choose their

sexual attractions and desires for partners but that these feelings are innate. A strong voice for

the affirmation of LGBTQ+, Lautier-Woodley offers the following synopsis of those aligned

with this lifestyle:

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[89] Owen Strachan, *Christianity and Wokeness: How the Social Justice Movement is Hijacking the Gospel–and the Way to Stop It* (Washington, DC: Salem Books, 2021), 22.

[90] Strachan, *Christianity and Wokeness,* 134.

[91] Strachan, *Christianity and Wokeness,* 74.

By coming out of the 'faith closet,' LGBT Christians transformed spiritual injury caused by religious homophobia into activism. In so doing they exposed the underexamined sexual heterogeneity of evangelical Christianity and the religious diversity of gays and lesbians. Further, they troubled Christian justifications of homophobia by preaching a radically inclusive gospel of Jesus Christ: homosexuals were not only loved by God, they were made in God's image. Gays and lesbians did not need to be healed or delivered. Homosexuality was a gift from God.[92]

Those who disagree with the conclusions made by Lautier-Woodley, and more broadly, the Woke movement, are regarded as *racists*. Oddly, this even includes people of color, as explained by Woodley:

Conservative black Christians strategically positioned themselves within a transhistorical narrative of biblical principle [sic] that erased the history of white supremacist Christianity. By adopting a romantic narrative of shared Christian identity, they claimed, in solidarity with white evangelicals, that scripture prohibited same-sex behavior—even though the same Bible contained several justifications for slavery and other forms of racial subjugation.[93]

These views are affirmed by other proponents of Woke religion, such as Eric Rodriguez, who encourages those in the gay, lesbian, bisexual (GLB) community to assert their God-given rights to embrace their own sexual identities and strive toward creating "religious safe-spaces" for others who share their views, as explained in his study on lesbian and gay intersectionality with the church.[94] Rodriguez further warns those in the GLB community that trying to denounce their natural inclinations is like "denying a part of him or herself that is believed to be immutable; like trying to deny one's race or parentage."[95] According to his study, choosing religion over sexuality or attempting to take part in conversion therapy so as not to be ostracized from their

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[92] Lautier-Woodley, "Faith's Queer Pleasures," 36.

[93] Lautier-Woodley, "Faith's Queer Pleasures," 177.

[94] Eric M Rodriguez, "At the Intersection of Church and Gay: Religion, Spirituality, Conflict, and Integration in Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual People of Faith" (Ph.D. Dissertation, City University of New York, 2006), 112, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global (Order No. 3213142).

[95] Rodriguez, "At the Intersection of Church and Gay," 100.

home churches will result in "damaging negative consequences," and embracing their sexual

identities while maintaining their spiritual faith is vital to their mental, physical, and spiritual

health.[96] In response to the outcry for inclusion, the faith community has seen a split among

churches that support the LGBTQ+ movement and those that stand firm on traditional family

values.

Historically, denominations have been debating LGBTQ+ inclusion since the late 20th

century, each determining their own levels of acceptance of this facet of Woke Religion. In a

recent phenomenological study on the issue of inclusion, a team of scholars interviewed

ministers, leaders, and congregants in Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches to uncover

the processes employed in establishing their stances on LGBTQ+ inclusion. The study relates

their findings to three common views and a more recent view found exclusively in the Methodist

Church:

- Traditional: marriage between one man and one woman, no exceptions
- Welcoming: LGBTQ+ individuals are welcome to worship, but the church does not condone alternative lifestyles or allow leadership roles
- Affirming: LGBTQ+ are welcome to worship and to serve; churches condone same-sex relationships
- Reconciling: inclusion for all sexual orientations and genders in policy and practices[97]

These perspectives are well-established, with churches utilizing this language so that those

seeking a church can identify the church's stance on the LGBTQ+ issue. According to the study,

churches that went through the process of determining which view to employ all endured

consequences and implications. Participants in the study noted alignment on LGBTQ+

discussion with their church's stance on social issues. Based on the interview responses, the

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[96] Rodriguez, "At the Intersection of Church and Gay," 112.

[97] Helen Wilson, et. al., "Addressing LGBTQ Inclusion: Challenges, Faith, and Resilience in the Church and Her People," *Social Work and Christianity* 48, no. 1 (Spring, 2021): 79, ProQuest.

authors of the study concluded that the church is "increasingly open to the conversation, more and more accepting of differences in persons, and increasingly committed to living in fellowship with others who represent difference. In some congregations and denominations, this includes beginning to recognize the legitimacy of membership, leadership, and inclusion of LGBTQ+ persons."[98] It is clear from this study that churches are at least welcoming the discussion of LGBTQ+ inclusion in the Christian faith.

The response of the church to LGBTQ+ inclusion is causing controversy across and sometimes within denominational lines; however, there are voices on the conservative right that are calling for a return to traditional values. Lutzer reminds that "without a belief in God as Creator, there is little hope of making sense of our lives and the roles we are intended to have in marriage, the family, and of course, sexuality."[99] Michael Brown concurs and offers a powerful statement of faith in his response to the LGBTQ+ community: "We want to see people freed from their internal pain. We want to see them find resolution for the emotional torment they're experiencing . . . But no amount of compassion can change biological and chromosomal realities. That is why the transgender movement is starting to hit the wall. Science is against it."[100] While Woke Religion proponents are reaching into schools, homes, and churches to establish a revised understanding of sexuality, conservative evangelicals are standing firm in the values defined by Scripture. Lutzer comments that "Our churches should count it a privilege to be welcoming of all people who struggle with their sexual identities, while recognizing that God does not affirm

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[98] Wilson, et. al., "Addressing LGBTQ Inclusion," 100.

[99] Lutzer, *We Will Not Be Silenced,*171.

[100] Michael Brown, "The Great Transgender 'Awokening'," *The Stream* July 12, 2019, https://stream.org/great-transgender-awokening/.

sexual relationships outside of the one-man, one-woman relationship in marriage."[101] Strachan

offers additional clarity in this area, noting that Wokeness "pushes hard against God's creation

order and the reality and goodness of the sexes. It seeks to subvert God's design and overcome

it."[102] Strachan further concludes that "The body is made for Creator worship…but fallen

sexuality turns our bodies into vessels of creation worship. Much as people around us are

encouraged to use their bodies in any way they desire, we must warn people away from this

ideology."[103] Ultimately, conservative leaders argue it is the church's responsibility to stand

against Woke teachings that guide people away from the truth of Scripture.

The debate over LGBTQ+ inclusion also opens the discussion about biblical

interpretations and translations of Scripture. Just as there are opposing sides to the affirmation of

alternative lifestyles, there are some who propose that Scripture clearly identifies homosexuality

in the Bible. In an article published in the *Theology & Sexuality Journal* in 2015, author Uri

Wernik highlights the Woke perspective that there are at least three homosexual couples in

Scripture: David and Jonathan (as depicted in I Samuel 18 and 20), Ruth and Naomi (Book of

Ruth), and Daniel and Ashpenaz (Book of Daniel).[104] According to Wernik, supporters of the

homosexual relationship of David and Jonathan rely mainly on verses that speak of their close

friendship and the fact that Scripture says they "kissed" when they met (which is a normal event

between men in Ancient Near Eastern Culture).[105] The relationship between Ruth and Naomi

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[101] Lutzer, *We Will Not Be Silenced,* 172.

[102] Strachan, *Christianity and Wokeness,* 75.

[103] Strachan, *Christianity and Wokeness,* 77.

[104] Uri Wernik, "Will the Real Homosexual in the Bible Please Stand Up?," *Theology & Sexuality*, 11:3, (April 21, 2015): 49, https://doi.org/10.1177/1355835805054345.

[105] Wernik, "Will the Real Homosexuals in the Bible Stand Up," 52-54.

was also close, that of a mother and daughter-in-law. Supporters of LGBTQ+ highlight the fact

that "Ruth clung to her" (Ruth 1:14, ESV) as evidence of a lesbian relationship, yet Wernik

reminds that Naomi refers to Ruth as my "daughter" (Ruth 2:22, ESV) in support of a loving

relationship between a mother and a daughter.[106] In the case of Daniel and Ashpenaz, LGBTQ+

sympathizers state that Daniel 1:9 is evidence of a homosexual relationship: "Now God had

brought Daniel into favour and tender love with the prince of the eunuchs" (Daniel 1:9, King

James Version), especially since no other heterosexual relationship between Daniel is noted in

Scripture. Once again, Wernik discounts this evidence by asserting that similar wording is used

in many places in the Bible, noticing specifically, God's attitude to his human creation: "who

crowneth thee with loving kindness and tender mercies" (Psalm 103:4, KJV). While the

LGBTQ+ community attempts to provide substantive arguments for the evidence of

homosexuality in Scripture, Wernik notes that "Most of the liberal discussants commit one or

more of the following 'sins': Using various biblical translations to the neglect of the Hebrew

origin or its literal translation; (2) Taking discrete verses out of their biblical context; (3)

Assuming that postmodern Western culture is not different from an antique Middle-Eastern

one."[107] Other LGBTQ+ proponents also declare that Jesus was a homosexual. Alden Bass of the

Apologetics Press states that "the argument for Jesus' homosexuality finds its strongest support

not in Scripture, but in its silence."[108] In their view, since the Bible does not say that Jesus is

"straight" it is reasonable to believe that he is gay. After a thorough review of the claims of

Jesus' homosexuality, Bass declares, "The only evidence in the Bible in favor of homosexuality

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[106] Wernik, "Weill the Real Homosexuals in the Bible Stand Up," 55.

[107] Wernik, "Will the Real Homosexuals of the Bible Please Stand Up," 50.

[108] Alden Bass, "Was Jesus Gay? An Examination of the Secret Gospel of Mark," *Apologetics Press* October 7, 2004, https://apologeticspress.org/was-jesus-gayan-examination-of-the-secret-gospel-of-mark-1431/.

is that which is read into the text by interpreters trying to shape a Jesus Who approves of their sinful lifestyle."[109] The evidence by Wernik and Bass denounces the stories of LGBTQ+ activities in which prominent figures of the Bible, including Jesus, participated in homosexual lifestyles.

<center>Black Lives Matter (BLM) and Critical Race Theory (CRT)</center>

Another key aspect of Woke religion that requires examination is the Black Lives Matter Movement. In an Associated Press news article published on June 11, 2020, Patrisse Cullors, one of the founding members of Black Lives Matter (BLM), explains that the group emerged when George Zimmerman, a white man, was acquitted of killing Trayvon Martin in 2012. Cullors comments, "When we started Black Lives Matter, it was really to have a larger conversation around this country."[110] After the death of George Floyd at the hands of a white police officer in Minnesota, the BLM movement shifted its focus to outcries for change throughout the nation. Thus, entrenched in Woke debate is the issue of Critical Race Theory (CRT) which has come to the forefront with the tragic and, in some cases, preventable deaths of black Americans. Sakira Cook, a BLM activist, is also cited in the AP News article, advising of the need to "interrogate the systemic racism and inequalities that exist in our society and help to dismantle them."[111] Concerns about widespread systemic racism and the lack of equality for all people are foundational to proponents of CRT, as described by author Margaret Zamudio:

> The Basic CRT assumption at work here is that the laws of a liberal, democratic, capitalist society, even those granting people of color formal equality, are inadequate in

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[109] Bass, "Was Jesus Gay?"

[110] David Crary and Aaron Morrison, "Black Lives Matter Goes Mainstream after Floyd's Death," *AP News* June 11, 2020, https://apnews.com/article/us-news-ap-top-news-mlb-baseball-nascar-347ceac3ea08978358c8c05a0d9ec37c.

[111] Crary, "Black Lives Matter."

remedying the legacy of over 200 years of state-sponsored racial inequality…Society's understandings of race, the meaning it has placed on blackness, redness, brownness, and whiteness is not undone with the stroke of a pen that brought us the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Thus, race as a socially constructed category carries with it historically derived meanings that continue to influence our present race-based ideas and interactions.[112]

While Zamudio references equality in this quote, there is a significant difference between a discussion of equality and that of equity. Equality infers the same treatment, regardless of race or gender, while equity implies the need for an appropriate measure of fairness and justice. Referencing the question of the distinction between equality and equity, Merriam and Webster explain, "it's possible that 'equal' treatment does not produce 'equity' when conditions and circumstances are very different."[113] Paula Dressel of the Race Matters Institute raises a similar concern, implying, "The route to achieving equity will not be accomplished through treating everyone equally. It will be achieved by treating everyone justly according to their circumstances."[114] Therefore, proponents of CRT infer that pursuing equality is not sufficient and emphasize the call to equity in all aspects of life.

Proponents of BLM and CRT seek to provide awareness about systemic racism across a broad spectrum of applications. Zamudio asserts that systemic racism is based on wealth and a long history of "racial exploitation,"[115] which affects overall quality of life. According to Zamudio, "White communities have directly enjoyed, and accumulated across generations, the

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[112] Margaret Zamudio, et. al., *Critical Race Theory Matters: Education and Ideology* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 22.

[113] Merriam-Webster Dictionary, s.v. "equality versus equity," accessed October 2, 2022, https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/equality-vs-equity-difference.

[114] "Racial Equality or Racial Equity? The Difference it Makes," Race Matters Institute, April 2, 2014, http://viablefuturescenter.org/racemattersinstitute/2014/04/02/racial-equality-or-racial-equity-the-difference-it-makes/.

[115] Zamudio, *Critical Race Theory Matters,* 27.

benefits of a color line used to determine the allocation of public and private goods such as education, jobs, and housing: the basic foundations for the accumulation of wealth."[116] A full exposition of CRT is too broad for the scope of this study; however, a review of the current literature is provided regarding the call for change in the Christian Church by proponents of Woke Religion and the insurgence of white supremacy teachings in the church.

The history of slavery in the United States has had a lasting impact on the nation and in the church, as discussed earlier in this review. Supporters of BLM and CRT assert that there is inherent racism that still plagues the country and is also rampant in the church. In his dissertation on the White Evangelical Church (WEC), Glenn Bracey compares the WEC to the Klu Klux Klan or "skinheads" and asserts that "The size, power, and character of the white evangelical movement have much to teach about the perduring nature of white racism and the relationship between power and social movements' form. White evangelicalism challenges us to recognize ways in which everyday whites are as racially motivated and organized as ever."[117] Bracey further suggests that the WEC is "not primarily a religious movement, but a racial movement in support of white supremacy."[118] In a journal article about race in religious organizations, Korie Edwards concurs, inferring that churches that call themselves interracial do not really serve minorities but focus instead on the desires of white people.[119] Edwards proposes that due to the

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[116] Zamudio, *Critical Race Theory Matters,* 27-28.

[117] Glenn Edward Bracey II, "The White Evangelical Church: White Evangelicalism as a Racial Social Movement," (Ph.D. Dissertation, Texas A&M University, 2016) 4-6, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global (Order No. 10290932).

[118] Bracey, "The White Evangelical Church," 3.

[119] Korie L. Edwards, "Bring Race to the Center: The Importance of Race in Racially Diverse Religious Organizations," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 47, no. 1 (2008): 5, https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/j.1468-5906.2008.00387.x.

privileged nature of whites, "racially diverse organizations will need to accommodate whites in order to retain them."[120] A final claim by Edwards indicates that those in the minority sector are not as satisfied with the "church experience" in racially diverse congregations.[121] These comments by Bracey and Edwards infer that privileged white Christians must come to a new understanding of minority experience and need the messaging of CRT to expose them to the truth.

Supporters of Woke Religion and CRT are working diligently to insert messages of change into schools, government, and, specifically, churches. Strachan shares the following list of ideas currently being offered by the "voices of Wokeness:"

- Evangelicals are hearing that they are "white supremacists" by nature

- Christians are being called to "repent for their 'whiteness' and reject their inherent 'white fragility'"

- Christians are told that they are complicit in the racist sins of their forebears

- Christians are urged to read complex realities and events in monocausal terms, with racism as the cause (for example, poverty, crime rates, shootings, and educational disparities)

- Christians are encouraged to align with Black Lives Matter, an organization with a polar-opposite worldview on matters of the natural family, the sexes, and human sexuality

- Christians are told to see "capitalism" as oppressive, unfair, and unjust, with socialism of various kinds as the preferable system

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[120] Edwards, "Bring Race to the Center," 6.

[121] Edwards, "Bring Race to the Center," 7.

- Christians are told that "white interpretation" has held the Church captive to a white agenda for too long, necessitating scholarship and research rooted in standpoint epistemology

- Christians are urged to support "reparations" and distributive justice (over retributive justice)

- Christians hear that they should support cultural relativism and that making judgments (along moral and other lines) about cultural practices is wrong

- Christians are directed to add their voice to "defund the police."[122]

This list of messages provides a clear picture of the anti-Christian messaging that is permeating the church as part of Woke Religion. According to Strachan, CRT and the teaching of white supremacy is at the heart of Wokism, with a focus on defeating "whiteness" as the primary goal: "Wokeness argues that the existence of racism in America means that 'white' people fall prey to a special form of evil beyond normal Adamic fallenness."[123] While Scripture teaches that the sacrifice of Christ has covered the sins of those who repent and surrender to Him as Lord, Strachan asserts that followers of the Woke religion deny that promise, declaring that "if we are 'white' or benefit from the system of 'whiteness,' we have an extra layer of sinful guilt that the Gospel does not innately overcome."[124] For Strachan, there is a clear difference between the Word of God and the word of Woke: "The Gospel announces forgiveness and resulting innocence; wokeness announces guilt and unending condemnation."[125]

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[122] Strachan, *Christianity and Wokeness,* 34.

[123] Strachan, *Christianity and Wokeness,* 11-12.

[124] Strachan, *Christianity and Wokeness*, 82.

[125] Strachan, *Christianity and Wokeness,* 84.

Another voice that stands against the teachings of CRT in society and in the church is Voddie T. Baucham, an African American pastor and theologian. Baucham offers an interesting rhetorical question as he shares insights into the discussion of CRT, asking, "Are we Christians or black people first?"[126] Baucham answers his own question by stating, "The Gospel is not something that merely sits on top of our identity. When we come to Christ, our identity is transformed completely."[127] Throughout his text, *Fault Lines,* Baucham provides details about CRT from the black perspective and those demanding justice for people of color. Baucham warns against the dangers of rushing to judgment in racial situations, "Beyond confronting falsehoods in general, our pursuit of justice must also be characterized by a pursuit of truth… we must be certain that we pursue justice on God's terms."[128] He outlines what he coins as the "Cult of Antiracism," noting that "Antiracism offers no salvation–only perpetual penance in an effort to battle an incurable disease."[129] Baucham asserts that those taken in by the CRT movement have removed the original sin of disobedience from Adam as the fall of man and replaced it with a new original sin, that of racism. Just as CRT has created a new original sin, Baucham declares that it has also established a new priesthood that includes "all oppressed minorities (people of color, women, LGBTQIA+, non-citizens, the disabled, the obese, the poor, non-Christians, and anyone else with an accepted oppressed status) qualify for the priesthood in the cult of racism."[130] CRT defends and upholds its priesthood and seeks continual repentance for the sin of

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[126] Baucham, *Fault Lines,* 21.

[127] Baucham, *Fault Lines,* 22.

[128] Baucham, *Fault Lines,* 44.

[129] Baucham, *Fault Lines,* 67.

[130] Baucham, *Fault Lines,* 91.

white supremacy and racism. John McWhorter provides an interesting summary of a method of dealing with the new religion of CRT and Wokism: "Just say no." He makes it clear that while Christians must stand firm against the teachings of CRT, those who affirm that white supremacy is widespread in the church will continue to refer to nay-sayers as racists. According to McWhorter, "The coping strategy, therefore, must be not to try to avoid letting them call you a racist, but to get used to their doing so and walk on despite of it."[131] McWhorter provides an important point when considering the role of the church in disseminating messages that either support or deny CRT.

<div align="center">Abortion</div>

Another topic that is closely aligned with Woke religion is abortion, the practice of terminating a pregnancy. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "In 2020, 620,327 legal induced abortions were reported to CDC from 49 reporting areas. Among 48 reporting areas with data each year during 2011–2020, in 2020, a total of 615,911 abortions were reported, the abortion rate was 11.2 abortions per 1,000 women aged 15–44 years, and the abortion ratio was 198 abortions per 1,000 live births."[132] In this section, a brief history of abortion in the United States is presented. Viewpoints are shared by those who believe abortion is a right for all women, as well as those who believe in the rights of the unborn.

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[131] John McWhorter, *Woke Racism: How a New Religion Has Betrayed Black America* (New York: Penguin Books, 2021), 172-73.

[132] Statistics on abortions in the United States are found on the website for Centers for Disease Control and Prevention at the following URL: https://www.cdc.gov/reproductivehealth/data_stats/.

Planned Parenthood (PP) is a pro-choice national organization that states its primary purpose is to provide affordable health care.[133] According to their website, abortions were not restricted until the mid-1800s, and abortions in that time period usually occurred by means of ingesting herbs and other medications. Planned Parenthood believes that abortion bans are a product of white supremacy, as enslaved black women were denied the right to control their own bodies. Planned Parenthood further decries that black women are still being judged by the nation's laws and "white supremacist culture."

While the Planned Parenthood organization would not officially form until 1933, it was founded on the principles established in 1916 when the first birth control clinic opened in Brownsville, Brooklyn, by Margaret Sanger. At the time, Sanger's belief in eugenics resulted in her alignment with the Ku Klux Klan rally, and she was labeled a racist as she endorsed a decision by the Supreme Court to allow women to be sterilized against their will. While those who support and serve in Planned Parenthood today call out the racist views of Sanger and the mistreatment of enslaved Black women, the work she pursued in the early 1900s resulted in the establishment of the current Planned Parenthood organization. The current Planned Parenthood organization states that "all people–of every race, religion, gender identity, ability, immigration status, and geography–are full human beings with the right to determine their own future and decide, without coercion or judgment, whether and when to have children."[134] The Planned Parenthood website provides details about various laws that have been passed over the years regarding the availability of abortions for all women, including the famous 1973 Supreme Court

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[133] Content referring to the history and objectives of the Planned Parenthood Organization were taken directly from the Planned Parenthood website at the following URL: https://www.plannedparenthood.org/about-us/who-we-are/our-history.

[134] This direct quote is stated on the Planned Parenthood website at the following URL: https://www.plannedparenthood.org/about-us/who-we-are/our-history.

Decision of *Roe vs. Wade* which guarantees this right in all fifty states. Planned Parenthood

continued to provide abortions for women until June of 2022, when the Supreme Court

overturned the *Roe vs. Wade* decision, returning the power of determining the legality of

abortions to the state level.[135] This decision has caused widespread protests from women's

groups and those who believe that abortion must remain legal for all women across the United

States.

The Supreme Court Decision in 2022 was welcomed by conservative Christians who

believe that abortion should not be legal. According to Mohler, "Abortion looms as a great moral

scar on the modern age–a singular symbol of the embrace of the culture of death in the most

technologically advanced nations on the earth."[136] Mohler calls for all Christians to stand for the

sanctity of human life. Christian author, church elder, and blogger Jim McCraigh concurs,

reminding that life begins at conception as defined in Psalm 139:

> For you formed my inward parts, you knitted me together in my mother's womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well. My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them (Psalm 139:13–16, ESV).

McCraigh stands on Scripture as the source of authority in his views against abortion. He also

shares insights about the dangers of chemical and surgical abortions to the mother, as well as the

lasting mental health effects. McCraigh indicates, "Many women have an abortion without

knowing or understanding its psychological effects and consequences…There will likely be

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[135] The *Dobbs vs. Jackson Women's Health Organization* decision of the Supreme Court can be viewed on the website of the Supreme Court at https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/slipopinion/21.

[136] Mohler, *The Gathering Storm,* 39.

grief, guilt, and even despair years down the road."[137] These concerns raised by McCraigh are

supported by a study conducted by Priscilla Coleman. Coleman's study involves a total of

877,181 participants, of whom 163,831 had experienced an abortion. According to Coleman,

"The research revealed that abortion was associated with a 34% increased risk for anxiety

disorders; 37% greater risk of depression; 110% greater risk of alcohol abuse and 220% greater

risk of marijuana use/abuse. Abortion was also linked with a 155% greater risk of attempting to

commit suicide."[138] Based on these findings, not only does abortion end the life of an unborn

child, but it also has potentially life-altering side effects for the mother. Mohler explains that

Christians can impact the fight for life by taking the following three actions:

1. Christians must first and foremost pray for God to intervene, change hearts, and shed his mercy on a nation lost in the seas of secularism.
2. Christians must equip themselves with the Word of God to preach and proclaim the glory of humanity enshrined in God's creative mandate.
3. Christians must champion adoption and foster care, and willingly step in to take on children who would have otherwise been aborted.[139]

Mohler and other conservative leaders argue that the fight for life begins with the people of God.

The Green Agenda

A presentation of Woke ideology is incomplete without an overview of the arguments

about the destruction of the environment. Current calls from environmental activists regarding

climate change and global warming have resulted in initiatives to move away from fossil fuels to

electric, sun, and wind power in an effort to save the planet from pending disasters. Yet,

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[137] Jim McCraigh, *Deceived No More: How to Find Absolute Truth in a World of Lies* (Weatherford, TX: AmericanFaithFreedom.us, 2022), 80.

[138] Priscilla K. Coleman. "Abortion and Mental Health: Quantitative Synthesis and Analysis of Research Published 1995–2009," *The British Journal of Psychiatry* 199, no. 3 (2011): 182, doi:10.1192/bjp.bp.110.077230.

[139] Mohler, *The Gathering Storm,* 55.

discussions about climate change and global warming have been around for more than one-

hundred-fifty years. While the researcher is not a scientist, this section provides an overview of

the development of study on the environment to create a foundation for the emphasis on the

green agenda today. A brief explanation of recent statistics and scientific studies is presented,

along with periodic findings and claims about climate change and the destruction of the planet.

Following the introduction of the scientific information, additional insight is provided relating to

the biblical response to climate change.

Statistical Information

The current discussion on climate change and other issues related to maintaining a green

environment indicates a wide range of views on the importance and implications of this issue.

Pew Research regularly conducts polls that address concerns about the green agenda and offer

the following data about current trends:

> About three-quarters of Americans say the Earth is getting warmer, including 53% who
> say it is mostly because of human activity, such as burning fossil fuels, and 24% who say
> it is mostly due to natural patterns in the Earth's environment. About one-in-ten
> Americans (9%) say there is no solid evidence that the Earth is getting warmer, and 13%
> say they are not sure.[140]

Based on Pew findings, the majority of Americans agree there is an issue; however, there is

ongoing debate on how to address the issues of climate change. There is a sharp contrast in the

views based on political ideology, as the research indicates that "The vast majority of Democrats

(83%) view global climate change as an extremely or very serious problem, while only a quarter

of Republicans share this view."[141] The views taken by opposing political parties also seem to be

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[140] "How Religion Intersects with Americans' Views on the Environment," Pew Research Center
November 17, 2022, https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2022/11/17/religious-groups-views-on-climate-change/.

[141] "How Religion Intersects with Americans' Views on the Environment."

intersected by religious views, as "nearly a quarter of all Republicans (23%) say climate change

is not a serious problem because God is in control of the climate, compared with 2% of

Democrats."[142] Pew deepens the discussion by addressing the various viewpoints of different

denominations as well, offering the following synopsis of responses of those polled:

> Among religious groups, evangelical Protestants are the most likely to say climate change is not a serious problem for most of these reasons, including that there are much bigger problems in the world today (34% of all evangelicals) and that God is in control of the climate (29%). Likewise, across all religious identities, highly religious Americans are more likely than those with lower levels of religious commitment to say climate change is not a serious problem, especially because there are bigger problems in the world (30%) or because God is in control of the climate (27%).[143]

Therefore, according to Pew Research, those on the religious right are less likely to be active in

efforts to make societal changes to avert the effects of climate change.

When looking at the future and making changes to slow the impact of climate change,

responses are also varied and find alliances with religious belief or lack thereof. Pew provides

the following summary of attitudes about reducing the effects of climate change:

> Most atheists (90%) and agnostics (84%) say humans can slow global climate change… The most common view in most other religious groups is that humans can slow climate change, and that if we make smart choices, it would not be too difficult.
>
> One-in-ten U.S. adults (11%) say humans cannot slow climate change, with evangelical Protestants more likely than people in any other religious category to express this belief (18%). Republicans, the party with which most evangelicals identify, are significantly more likely than Democrats to say that climate change cannot be stopped (21% vs. 3%).
>
> A majority of U.S. adults–including most people across a variety of religious groups – say society should focus both on slowing the progression of climate change and getting ready to deal with its effects, rather than just one or the other.
>
> Most U.S. adults say society should focus both on slowing climate change and preparing to deal with its effects. Evangelical Protestants are the group least likely to say that either or both of these efforts should be a priority, which is in line with their status as the group

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[142] "How Religion Intersects with Americans' Views on the Environment."

[143] "How Religion Intersects with Americans' Views on the Environment."

most inclined to say that neither should be a priority (15%) or that climate change is not a problem (17%). Still, about two-thirds of evangelicals say society should focus on slowing climate change (7%), getting ready to deal with the effects of climate change (11%), or both (49%).[144]

The statistics gathered by Pew provide a clear illustration of the various views of the nation's population. Additional perspective can be gained by looking at insights gained through a historical lens.

Historical Insights

One of the earliest presentations of climate change was introduced by John Tyndall in 1859. Tyndall's experiments were the first to establish that "molecules of gases such as water vapour [European spelling], carbon dioxide and methane, do indeed absorb more energy than oxygen and nitrogen when radiant heat is passed through them."[145] According to scholars, Tyndall's work "suggested the possibility that by altering concentrations of these gases in the atmosphere human activities could alter the temperature regulation of the planet" and has been credited with "establishing the experimental basis for the putative 'greenhouse effect'" that had been alluded to by scientists of the late 1700s.[146] This effect has been tracked by NASA and is reflected in the figure below, noting a gradual increase in the surface temperature of the earth.

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[144] "How Religion Intersects with Americans' Views on the Environment."

[145] Mike Hulme, *Exploring Climate Change through Science and in Society an Anthology of Mike Hulme's Essays, Interviews and Speeches* (Washington, DC: Taylor & Francis Group, 2013), 138.

[146] Hulme, *Exploring Climate Change through Science*, 146.

Data source: NASA's Goddard Institute for Space Studies (GISS).
Credit: NASA/GISS
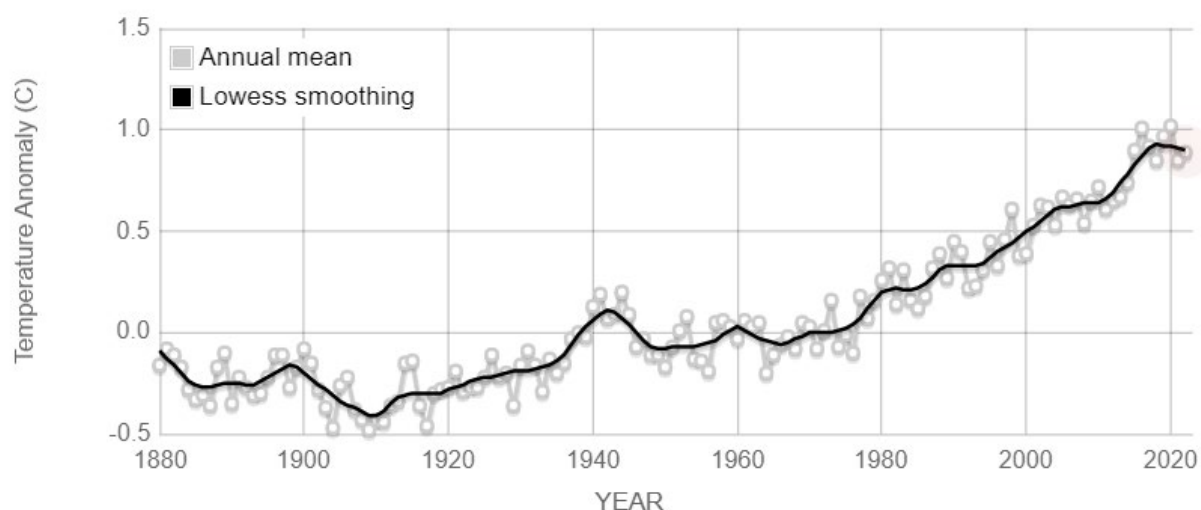
Figure 1. Global Land-Ocean Temperature Index[147]

According to NASA, "Earth's global average surface temperature in 2020 statistically tied with

2016 as the hottest year on record, continuing a long-term warming trend due to human

activities."[148] The statistics, as presented by NASA, have contributed to the discussion of climate

change and global warming over the years.

The topic of climate change and the greenhouse effect was brought to the forefront by

then-British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher in a speech given to the Royal Society in London.

Historical records indicate that Prime Minister Thatcher "was the first senior world leader to turn

human interference with the climate system into a national and international policy issue of the

first importance."[149] Shortly after the speech by Thatcher, scientists and the Intergovernmental

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[147] Holly Shaftel, site editor, "Global Temperature," NASA Global Climate Change: Vital Signs of the Planet, accessed March 26, 2023, https://climate.nasa.gov/vital-signs/global-temperature/.

[148] Shaftel, "Global Temperature."

[149] Hulme, *Exploring Climate Change through Science*, 37.

Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) began formulating a plan to deal with the concern over global warming, focusing on the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.[150] In the United States, former Vice President Al Gore became the spokesperson for climate change awareness in his 2006 documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth,* the aim of which was "to convince individuals to take action to reduce climate change."[151] The attention Gore brought to the topic of climate change earned him a share of the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize, along with the IPCC.

The discussion of climate change has not diminished over the years and continues to see dramatic shifts as new voices raise concerns about the future of the planet. In 2019, teenage activist Greta Thunberg of Switzerland received international fame for her outspoken concerns over global warming. Thunberg began her activism by organizing a strike to draw attention to the effects of climate change and greenhouse gases. In 2021, Anandita Sabherwal and several colleagues conducted a study into what they termed "The Greta Thunberg Effect." In the article that summarizes their data, they credit Thunberg with "mobilizing over 10 million climate strikers."[152] The researchers assert that the younger generation has increased their awareness of the issues of climate change due to the efforts of Thunberg; however, they go on to say that "Greta Thunberg's influence may also be stronger among those with a more liberal political ideology."[153] The conclusion of their study indicates:

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[150] Hulme, *Exploring Climate Change through Science*, 41.

[151] Grant D. Jacobsen, "The Al Gore Effect: An Inconvenient Truth and Voluntary Carbon Offsets," *Journal of Environmental Economics and Management* 61, Issue 1 (January 2011): 67, https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0095069610001014?via%3Dihub.

[152] Anandita Sabherwal, et. al., "The Greta Thunberg Effect: Familiarity with Greta Thunberg Predicts Intentions to Engage in Climate Activism in the United States." *Journal of Applied Social Psychology* 51, (April 2021): 322, https://doi.org/10.1111/jasp.12737.

[153] Sabberwal, "The Greta Thunberg Effect," 323.

> Taken together, our results provide preliminary evidence in support of the "Greta Thunberg Effect." Those who were more familiar with Greta Thunberg were more likely than those who were less familiar to intend to take collective action to reduce global warming. Also, in support of our hypotheses, collective efficacy mediated this effect. This suggests that familiarity with Greta Thunberg is related to individuals' greater sense of collective efficacy—the belief that, by working together with like-minded others, they can reduce global warming—and, may in turn motivate them to take collective actions to reduce global warming…. In contrast to age, political ideology moderated the (direct) "Greta Thunberg Effect" such that familiarity with Greta Thunberg was related to higher collective action intentions among liberals but not conservatives.[154]

Therefore, the discussion of global warming has remained an important secular topic, yet based on this information, it appears to find stronger alignment with those on the left side of the political aisle.

Biblical View of Climate Change

The historical references to climate change, global warming, and the green agenda provide a foundation for its inclusion in this study; however, as this study is based on a biblical worldview, the discussion would be incomplete without making a connection to Scripture. The story of creation is contained in the Book of Genesis and clearly, indicates that God granted dominion and care of the earth to humans (Gen. 1:26–28). In Genesis chapter 2, the Bible clearly states that "The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it" (Gen. 2:15, ESV). Scripture further reminds that while God has granted dominion and charged humans to "work and keep" the earth, it still belongs to the Lord (Psalm 24:1). Thus, as humans work and keep the earth, they should do so with good stewardship as described in Colossians 3:23 to "work heartily as for the Lord and not for men" (ESV). Wisdom can also be gained from instruction in the Book of Leviticus, where the landowners were encouraged not to "reap your field right up to its edge, neither shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. And you shall

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[154] Sabberwal, "The Greta Thunberg Effect," 329.

not strip your vineyard bare, neither shall you gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard. You shall leave them for the poor and for the sojourner" (Lev. 19:9–10, ESV). In his commentary on Leviticus 19, Matthew Henry posits, "That we must not be covetous and griping, and greedy of every thing we can lay any claim to; nor insist upon our right in things small and trivial."[155] While this verse speaks to providing compassion and care for others, it could be argued that this passage also has application to how humans care for the earth to ensure that those who come after will benefit from its resources.

Response from Christians on Climate Change and Environmental Issues

Active debate continues regarding the source of climate change and the actions required to lessen the effects of global warming. This topic is far too broad to be covered in this dissertation; however, as a key secular issue presented to students in the survey and in the focus group, a biblical response from scholarly sources from the Christian perspective is warranted. The views of these scholars offer additional insight when coupled with the data presented as part of the historical review of climate change.

Christian perspectives vary widely on the topic of climate change, as noted previously in the statistical analysis provided by Pew Research. Matthew Riley of the Yale Divinity School and the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies raises concerns about the impacts of climate change yet states that it is a problem that is potentially too difficult to resolve:

> Climate change, considered broadly, drives, complicates, and exacerbates other environmental issues. In this sense, climate change is not a single-issue problem nor is it one that is easily solved. It might better be conceived of as a wicked problem, that is, a problem that is inordinately complex, constantly evolving, and lacking in a concrete stopping point. Wicked problems like climate change are, in other words, problems that

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[155] Matthew Henry, "Commentary on Leviticus 19," *Blue Letter Bible,* Last modified 1 Mar, 1996, https://www.blueletterbible.org/Comm/mhc/Lev/Lev_019.cfm.

resist resolution because of their ability to outpace scientific research and ethical responses.[156]

Based on his study of environmental issues, Riley asserts that climate change needs to be viewed not only as a scientific issue but also as an ethical one.

A differing view is provided by Jim McCraigh, who is known for his blog, *The American Faith and Freedom Blog.* McCraigh concurs with most Americans that Christians have a duty to care for the earth because God created it and entrusted it to His people. He states, "This is known as stewardship, the act of being responsible for the care and nurturing of something you don't own."[157] Yet, McCraigh considers the threat of climate change to be a deception and stands opposed to the statements that humans are responsible for causing damage to the earth or that the earth is even showing significant warming trends. He also asserts, "there have been hot years and hot decades since the turn of the last century, and colder years and colder decades. But the overall measured temperature shows no clear trend over the last century, at least not one that would suggest runaway warming."[158] McCraigh further recalls that numerous predictions have been made by scientists and activities about the definite destruction of the earth and civilization within 15 to 20 years if there is not immediate and severe action taken to stop global warming. In his text, McCraigh reminds that these predictions made in the late 1900s have not come to pass. From McCraigh's Christian perspective, the emphasis on taking care of the earth is correct; however, he questions the overarching fear of the destruction of the planet due to global warming.

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[156] Matthew T. Riley, "The Wicked Problem of Climate Change," *Worldviews: Environment, Culture, Religion,* 21, no. 1 (2017): 62.

[157] McCraigh, *Deceived No More,* 67.

[158] McCraigh, *Deceived No More,* 70.

A similar response to concerns over global warming is addressed by Donald W. Holdridge. In his book *Climate Change and the Bible,* Holdridge shares a common-sense approach to pursuing a green environment while remembering that God is in control. His basic tenet is that Christians who believe in a God that created the universe can rest assured that He will also sustain it. Holdridge states the world must be leery of those who proclaim, "the God who created the universe, who sustains all things by His mighty hands, and who became the Lamb of God in order to take away mankind's sin also made a world with the potential for calamity and devastation."[159] Scripture recounts that God controlled the winds, rains, and seasons in biblical times (Job 38:22–35). A reading of Genesis 8:22 reminds, "While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night, shall not cease" (ESV). Based on his research, Holdridge stands firm that God is still in control of weather and climate today.

Holdridge shares a view of climate change from a biblical and historical perspective, offering details of past cold and warm periods on the earth. According to Holdridge, "It is likely that the post-flood climatic conditions also degenerated, triggering global cooling. Although there is no explicit verse in the Bible which claims that the temperatures plummeted, massive environmental disturbances resulting from the deluge could have plunged the earth into an Ice Age shortly after the flood."[160] Citing scientific data throughout his text, Holdridge then speaks to other climatic events that caused the shifts in the earth's temperature. According to Holdridge, Earth saw temperature increases and decreases over time through the early Roman Empire, the Dark Ages, and the Medieval Period, moving through what he noted as the "Little Ice Age" and

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[159] D. W. Holdridge, *Climate Change and the Bible* (Meadville, PA: Christian Faith Publishing, 2019), 15.

[160] Holdridge, *Climate Change and the Bible,* 44.

bringing us to the "Current Warm Period."[161] Holdridge summarizes that the current warming trends are no more alarming than those experienced in the past and point to the benefits of warmer weather, such as longer growing seasons, fewer severe winter storms, lower heating bills, and reduced sickness. As Holdridge closes his text, he presents a scholarly review of the Book of Revelation, which clearly depicts the events that will result in the destruction of the old world to make way for the new at a day and a time that is not known to humans (Matt. 24:36). Holdridge contends that the role of Christians is not to focus on the green movement but on people.

> Bible-believing people of faith around the world should not be taken in by impassioned pleas from politicians, climate scientists, and religious leaders concerning the pledging of huge amounts of personal and national wealth to an international panel controlled by the United Nations…. Instead, churches should be donating their energies and resources to Christian agencies that directly feed (physically and spiritually), water, shelter, clothe, and inoculate the people where they are at. Such gifts will go more directly to the people who need it most, not to scientific grants, corporations, and bureaucrats.[162]

Centrality and Impact of Preaching

The purpose of sermons and messages within the church is to provide biblical exegesis for the congregants. Thus, messages delivered by pastors and other church leaders are vital to spiritual growth and biblical understanding for the church community. In his text, *Woke Religion: Unmasking the False Gospel of Social Justice*, Wes Carpenter dissects Woke Religion's foundations and compares true biblical theology versus that offered by Woke theology. He warns that Christians need to be careful of falling prey to the teachings of Woke religion, noting that "Many Woke evangelicals call people to 'listen' to the minorities in society.

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[161] Holdridge, *Climate Change and the Bible,* 43, 47, 72, 83, 92, 103.

[162] Holdridge, *Climate Change and the Bible*, 328-29.

The Bible teaches that Christians ought to do more than listen; we ought to obey God and care for orphans and widows because this is pure religion (James 1:26–27). The context of oppression and injustice in the Bible is not the same as the categories of Woke religion."[163] Thus, Carpenter implies that preaching biblical truth is the key, not preaching the values of a societal movement. James Baldwin agrees, based on the findings of his study on the centrality of preaching, indicating that "The gospel has gone down a new street….This new street has all but removed biblical authority from preaching, thus from their worship as well. As mentioned previously, when the pre-modem hermeneutic of accepting Scripture as God's Word is replaced with a modem, scientific hermeneutic, it is understandable that homiletics will undergo a change as well."[164] Baldwin summarizes that for some churches, this has meant a movement away from the centrality of preaching of the original gospel message which is detrimental to believers who are counting on pastors to provide biblical truth.[165] He offers a reminder that "Preaching is central to Christian worship because it is the way God gave to proclaim His Word, which informs every aspect of worship."[166] Preaching must remain the guiding principle of Sunday gatherings.

While preaching is primary, the content of the message must also focus on scriptural teachings. Strachan reminds believers that "The solution to what we face is not to downplay biblical complementarity to avoid offending those pulled to paganism. The solution is to preach the truth in love and live according to the truth in joy and hope."[167] In her study on Sunday

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[163] Carpenter, *Woke Religion*, 272.

[164]Wesley James Baldwin, "The Centrality of Preaching in Christian Worship" (Ph.D. Dissertation Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015), 9, ProQuest Central; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global (Order No. 10014221).

[165] Baldwin, "The Centrality of Preaching," 14.

[166] Baldwin, "The Centrality of Preaching," 68.

[167] Strachan, *Christianity and Wokeness,* 79.

messages offered in the Baptist church, Jeanine Tanner discovers that "When discussing why they preach on any given social issue, pastors explain their actions in one of three basic ways: because an issue is important to the pastor; because an issue is addressed in Scripture; or because an issue is relevant to a congregation or larger community."[168] This implies that if the pastor is sympathetic to Woke ideology on a personal level, messaging could also be presented in a way that affirms the values of Woke religion. Tanner further indicates that often, "If a given social issue is important to a pastor, it is likely he or she will at some point, in some way, take advantage of the weekly preaching opportunity to address this issue from the pulpit. Such preaching is often well thought out and grounded in Scripture. But ultimately pastors speak from their hearts, from their passions and from their places of understanding."[169] Tanner's remark about preaching on social issues being grounded in Scripture can be positive, but it can be concerning depending on the hermeneutics being applied. It could mean that Scripture is being interpreted in ways that coincide with the pastor's personal beliefs rather than the biblical truth.

In a study on the role of political messages in religious settings, Gabrielle Malina notices similar findings. Malina states her research suggests that "churchgoers–regardless of ideological or partisan views, religious affiliation, or frequency of church attendance–pay attention to political and ideological cues when offered them."[170] Malina and Tanner agree about the important role of pastors in disseminating information about social and political issues. A Pew

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[168] Allison Jeanne Tanner, "Engaging the Inner Prophet: How American Baptist Pastors Preach on Social Issues in an Age of Tolerance and Schism" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Graduate Theological Union, 2011), 40, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global (Order No. 3459517).

[169] Tanner, "Engaging the Inner Prophet," 42.

[170] Gabrielle Malina, "Essays on the Role of Politics for Religious Affiliation and Identity," (Ph.D. Dissertation, Harvard University, 2020) 93, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global; Social Science Premium Collection (Order No. 28150147).

Research Poll conducted in 2016 validates these findings. In the survey, participants were asked to provide insight on the number of times that their clergy shared messages about six key social issues: religious liberty, homosexuality, abortion, immigration, environmental issues, and economic inequality. Those polled state that they attended services at least once or twice in the period before the survey. Results of the Pew Research Poll indicate that approximately two-thirds of the representative sample (64%) say that their pastor or spiritual leader spoke about at least one of the six social and political issues included in the survey.[171] These results, as provided by Pew Research, give credence to social and political messaging being delivered from the pulpit; however, Pew Research did not provide insights on whether those being polled changed their opinions about specific topics based on weekly sermons given by their pastors. The focus of this author's study on Woke messaging is to explore the impact of sermons by pastors and youth leaders in a more significant way, exposing any influences that worshipers may experience in weekly worship.

Literature Review Conclusion

The topic of Woke Religion is vast, and there are multiple facets associated with the movement. The focus of this Literature Review is to provide a backdrop for the proposed research that is shaped by Scripture, informed by history, advanced by statistical data, and deliberated by pastors and theological scholars. This review provides insight from opposing sides of the Woke movement. It includes an overview of the historical impact of the Social Gospel on Woke religion today, as well as a discussion of current political debates and documents that have the potential to transform the way the church functions. The topics of Identity and

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[171] "Many Americans Hear Politics from the Pulpit," Pew Research Center, August 8, 2016, https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2016/08/08/many-americans-hear-politics-from-the-pulpit/.

Intersectionality, LGBTQ+ inclusion, and Critical Race Theory have been identified as key elements of Woke ideology that are permeating the church. The centrality of preaching is recognized as a key factor in shaping Christian thought, which validates the need for further study on the impact of preaching for those who regularly attend worship. As stated earlier in this review, there has been minimal scholarly research conducted on the impact of the Woke movement in relationship to the worship of college-aged students and their witness to others. A search of academic sites results in limited dissertations and journal articles that directly address the concerns raised by the author of this dissertation. The lack of scholarly research in this area has necessitated the pursuit of this study.

Chapter 3: Methods

Introduction

Woke religion has experienced widespread expansion recently, yet the study of this phenomenon is minimal. A review of the topic has unearthed a few dissertations supporting the tenets of Wokism, focusing mainly on the message of the social gospel; however, there appear to be no studies seeking to determine the effects of the integration of Woke ideology in the church. Leaders of the Christian faith are divided on acceptance, inclusion, and messaging on Woke ideals being presented in the church. As those who are for and against the values of Woke religion stand on opposing sides, it is vital that more comprehensive research be conducted that explores the potential negative consequences to believers who worship each Sunday in the nation's churches.

Woke religion continues to seep into the Christian church, as many denominations are moving toward statements of tolerance, welcome, and support of secular agendas. The research aim of this study is to uncover connections between the integration of Woke religion in churches, and any influences Woke messages have on believers, specifically how college-aged students understand worship and how they witness to other people. This chapter begins with a complete overview of the research design, including the method and philosophical view, and a review of the key research question and statement of purpose. Next, details about the type of instrumentation used and the population and research sample are discussed, and the procedures to collect and analyze the data are explored. Finally, limitations of the study are disclosed to provide transparency about the potential insufficiencies of the study.

Research Design

Research Method

The research design for this study involves a convergent mixed method approach which is strongly supported by current research trends. John W. Creswell and Vicki Clark discuss the importance of mixed methods research, noting that some studies require a combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods. Creswell and Clark state, "A combination of both forms of data provides the most complete analysis of complex problems. Researchers situate numbers in the contexts and words of participants, and they frame the words of participants with numbers, trends, and statistical results. Both forms of data are necessary today."[1] Historical data indicate that initial interest in combining both qualitative and quantitative research began in the 1950s and has experienced adjustment and refinement over the years.[2] Creswell further comments that the value of mixed methods study "resides in the idea that all methods had bias and weaknesses, and the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data neutralized the weaknesses of each form of data."[3] This research employs a QUAN-QUAL model, described by Lorraine Gay and Peter Airasian, as a study "where qualitative and quantitative data are equally gathered and collected concurrently."[4] Creswell and Clark note that in convergent parallel mixed methods, the researcher "uses two types of data to examine facets of the same phenomenon,"[5] which is

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[1] John W. Creswell and Vicki L. Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research* 3rd ed. (Los Angeles: SAGE Publishing, 2018), 23.

[2] Creswell and Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 24-30.

[3] John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2014), 14-15.

[4] Lorraine Gay and Peter Airasian, *Educational Research: Competencies for Analysis and Applications* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Prentice Hall, 2003), 184-85.

[5] Creswell and Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 73.

exemplified in this study. The application of this model provides the opportunity to analyze the quantitative and qualitative data and find connective points that confirm the accuracy of the data. Creswell adds further support to this approach, indicating that a convergent parallel mixed methods design allows for the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data that is integrated and compared in a more thorough analysis.[6] In this study, a side-by-side comparison is employed, incorporating a presentation of the quantitative analysis first, followed by a discussion of the qualitative findings. Although debate existed in the past about implementing mixed methods research, studies have increased across multiple disciplines, providing a strong foundation for the application of mixed methods research as the foundation for this study.[7]

<div align="center">Worldview and Philosophy</div>

This study is grounded in a biblical worldview. After the close of the canon, the Bible became the authoritative voice of truth, proclaiming the Word of God to God's people. Historically, the Church has relied on the Scriptures as a plumb line to validate church teachings. The foundation of this study rests on the same biblical principles. It is based on 2 Timothy 3:16–17, which declares, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." Standing on the promise of this passage and noting the emphasis on teaching and equipping, the focus of the study is to understand how the integration of Woke religion into the modern church may be undermining the understanding and application of Scripture in college-aged students, directly affecting their personal and corporate worship, as well as their ability to witness to others.

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[6] Creswell, *Research Design,* 219.

[7] Creswell and Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 34.

This study is also guided by pragmatism. Creswell and Clark explain the focus of pragmatism "is on the consequences of research, on the primary importance of the question asked rather than the methods, and on the use of multiple methods of data collection to inform the problems under study."[8] Paul Leedy and Jeanne Ormrod indicate that a mixed methods study is effective for formulating a more complete study that allows for complementary data to be gathered and presumably triangulated to achieve more convincing conclusions.[9] The study will incorporate both quantitative and qualitative research allowing for broader perspectives in answering the key research question.

<div align="center">Research Question and Purpose</div>

The central research question of this study is: As mainline Christian denominational churches adjust messaging and theological belief statements to adopt the progressive values of Woke Religion, in what ways are they impacting the worship and the witness of college-age students? This question is based on the purpose of the study, which is to formulate an understanding and awareness of the effects of Woke ideology in the church. The key research question will be explored utilizing a survey to analyze responses quantitatively, and a focus group will be assembled to encourage a broader discussion and examination of the potential effects of Wokism through more open-ended questions. The results of both the quantitative and qualitative research will be analyzed and compared to establish if convergence has occurred in response to the key research question when combining the two methods of research.

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[8] Creswell and Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 37.

[9] Paul D. Leedy and Jeanne Ellis Ormrod, *Practical Research: Planning and Design* 12th ed. (New York: Pearson Publishing, 2019), 260-261.

Instrumentation

While the study is cross-sectional in design, it begins with the survey to establish patterns that could guide the direction of the focus group discussion. The initial instrument used in this study is an anonymous survey to gather objective mathematical data that will be analyzed using SPSS software to track trends in participant responses. Those who decide to complete the survey will be asked three screening questions to verify that they meet the criteria for participation. The remaining survey questions are designed to elicit responses that will effectively address the impact of Woke religion based on participant age, denominational background, messaging from the pulpit and youth events, and the use of church and pastoral social networking to post stances on secular agendas that align with Woke ideology. Participants will be asked to provide responses to levels of agreement or opposition to the following Woke agenda topics:

- Homosexuality
- Gay Marriage
- Transgenderism
- Gender Fluidity
- Critical Race Theory
- Black Lives Matter Movement
- Abortion Rights
- Environment Issues (climate change, Green New Deal)
- Political ideology (Conservatism, Liberalism, Socialism, Progressivism)

Survey questions are designed to address not only if Woke messages are delivered but also the frequency with which they are offered. This line of questioning will provide clarity on how repeated messaging and church- or pastor-sponsored social networking posts impact the perspectives of those participating in the survey.

Occurring concurrently, the qualitative phase of the study incorporates a focus group to provide a more open-ended discussion of the key questions of the study. While the focus group questions have been pre-established, since the focus group occurs shortly after the initial

gathering of survey responses, initial data collected and analyzed could provide meaningful insight into the direction of focus group questions. Similar to the survey questions, the focus group also provides responses to the type and frequency of Woke messaging in the participants' home churches and youth group gatherings. In addition, the open-ended questions posed to the focus group will seek to gather initial insight about whether the students felt compelled to accept the messages as they were presented, discuss the topics with family or friends, or attempt to confirm or correct the messages with Scripture. While both the survey and focus group participants are asked to rank the Woke messages that they feel are most important (either in affirmation or opposition), the focus group invites the students to explain why they believe in their stated conviction. Further, students in the focus group are questioned about whether the church they attend currently employs messaging that aligns with those relayed in their home churches and why they have chosen to attend a church that is similar or different in messaging styles. The focus group also offers the opportunity to ask how the messaging of the student's home church impacts the way they view prominent social issues personally and in conversations with their peers. The focus group provides the opportunity for narrative responses that offer a broader response to key questions in the study.

<p style="text-align:center">Population and Research Sample</p>

The broad population for this study includes young adults between 18 and 25 years of age. As many within this age group are college students and the focus of the research involves faith and worship, the sample is drawn from Christian universities, which innately enroll a larger population of Christian students. Higher institutions of learning are identified through cluster

sampling to ensure that participants meet the established demographic. Once clusters are determined, random sampling will be employed, allowing equal opportunity to participate.[10]

For the quantitative aspect of the study, students complete a survey that provides key background information. Students answer questions about age, denomination, frequency of attendance at worship or youth events, teaching about Woke topics, and the use of social media to share church messaging on Woke issues. Because participation in the study and completion of the survey is voluntary, a definitive number of respondents cannot be determined; however, the goal is to arrive at a minimum of 350 participants per the standard for quantitative analysis.[11]

A focus group is employed to gather qualitative data for the study. Participants are recruited from Liberty University, where the researcher is in residence. Snowball sampling is encouraged, with committed volunteers inviting other qualified participants to join the group. While the questions posed in this phase of the study are similar to those in the survey, the probative nature will encourage more in-depth responses to important aspects of the research.

<div align="center">Data Collection</div>

Mixed Methods research is more complex than a study that is designed to follow either quantitative or qualitative methods. As defined by Creswell and Clark, this study follows a fixed mixed methods design, "in which the use of quantitative and qualitative methods is predetermined and planned at the start of the research process and the procedures are implemented as planned."[12] Additionally, the data collection follows a convergent design, which, as explained by Creswell and Clark, "involves gathering both the quantitative and qualitative

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[10] John W. Creswell, *Research Design,* 158.

[11] Creswell and Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 177.

[12] Creswell and Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 52.

data at roughly the same time, analyzing the two databases separately, and then merging or comparing the results from the two databases."[13] Data is collected from independent sources, including participants who complete the anonymous survey and those who volunteer to engage in discussion with other peers in the focus group. As the focus group is being offered at the same location at which the survey is being offered, it is possible that students may opt to complete the online survey in addition to participating in the focus group. Since the survey is anonymous, and none of the planned questions for the focus group require students to reveal their participation in the survey, answers submitted in the survey will not affect the outcome of the focus group discussion.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to conducting the research, an application was made to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Liberty University. Upon receiving approval for the study from the Liberty IRB, requests were sent to the IRBs at other universities identified in the cluster sampling. When requested, documents were provided from other IRBs to be granted permission to recruit student participation in other locations. While participation is voluntary, those completing the survey and taking part in the focus group received notification of informed consent, disclosing potential threats to the students electing to participate in the study. An estimated timeline for completing the survey and interview phase of the study was also provided to the students to assist them in determining their choice to be included in the study.

Surveys were administered through Google Forms, an online site that collects anonymous responses. No personal data was gathered, so there are no distinguishing factors to indicate the identity of the participants in the quantitative portion of the study. The responses were

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[13] Creswell and Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*, 187.

downloaded on the researcher's personal laptop computer and then analyzed by entering the data into SPSS statistical software.

The focus group was confidential and proctored by the researcher. The discussion was recorded on the researcher's personal cell phone, then transferred to the researcher's private laptop for secure storage. No identifying factors of the focus group participants were included, as results of the study are shared in the formal dissertation document.

<div align="center">Trustworthiness</div>

Credibility

The use of focus groups is an established practice for gathering qualitative data. Leedy and Ormrod state that "interviews can often yield a rich body of qualitative information" and indicate that "heterogeneous focus groups can be especially helpful as a means of getting diverse perspectives on a complex issue."[14] The qualitative aspect of this study is a focus group comprised of six heterogeneous 18 to 25-year-old college students who have attended worship at least twice per month on average. The requirements for participation in the focus group mirror those in the online survey. Further, the questions in the focus group are designed to complement those in the online survey while allowing for open-ended responses by the participants. This results in methodological triangulation, as the topic of the secularization of church messaging and its impact on college students is researched from multiple approaches.

Participants in the focus group are residential students from Liberty University. As the mission of Liberty University is to "Train Champions for Christ," the broad population of residential students at Liberty are conservative leaning. While the researcher has no direct

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[14] Leedy and Ormrod, *Practical Research,* 244-45.

teaching role in the residential courses at Liberty, the viewpoints of the student body and the culture of the university are understood from a similar perspective in Liberty's online student population. Students who participated in the focus group were instructed to speak openly about their viewpoints. They were encouraged to present their current position on a given topic and expand their responses to incorporate more insight into the application of their views in daily life. This process allowed for redirection, when necessary, to ensure truthfulness in student responses. The transcription of the focus group dialogue was coded by category and compared to the results of the quantitative analysis conducted as part of the online survey.

The researcher has more than four decades of service in worship ministry and has been on staff at churches across multiple denominations. This experience, coupled with advanced degrees in worship, contributes to the academic and life application of the topics discussed in this research. While these qualifications provide stability to the research process to maintain integrity, frequent debriefing and peer scrutiny occurred throughout the research process between the researcher and those serving on the dissertation committee. In addition, data checking was conducted with committee members to ensure the accuracy of the gathered information.

Transferability, Dependability, and Confirmability

In mixed methods research, the researcher must ensure the transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the data collection. Leedy and Ormrod assert that a strength of mixed methods research is that "a perceptive researcher might discern underlying patterns and dynamics in social interactions or cultural artifacts that a standardized, quantitative assessment would never illuminate."[15] This benefit of mixed methods research requires the researcher to remain objective and neutral in gathering and interpreting the qualitative data. As complete

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[15] Leedy and Ormrod, *Practical Research,* 239.

objectivity cannot be assured, Leedy and Ormrod suggest the researcher "adhere to the standard of confirmability…and describe their data-collection and data processes in considerable detail– such that other researchers might draw similar conclusions from similarly collected and analyzed data."[16] The researcher has indicated that this study is based on a biblical worldview; however, in an effort to adhere to practices of reflexivity, the interviews conducted during the focus group allowed students to express their opinions about each topic freely. In addition, students were recruited across multiple disciplines, so the viewpoints expressed in the interviews would include diverse perspectives from students not enrolled solely in worship ministry programs. Contributing further to the dependability of the data, the researcher followed the guidelines of Leedy and Ormrod to "separate descriptive data…from the researcher's interpretations and reflections."[17] The implementation of member checking and review of coded information by committee members further assures the dependability and confirmability of the data. The transferability of this study provides opportunity for other researchers to review findings and make applications to individual topics of Wokism or comparative analysis with participants in other age groups or broader denominational alignment.

Limitations and Delimitations

The influence and spread of Woke Religion are visible in multiple areas of modern culture. While the impact of Woke ideology is felt in many aspects of life, this study is confined to the effects of Woke messaging delivered in churches, with specific application to college-aged students. In this section, the limitations and delimitations of the study are presented to offer transparency about the focus of the research conducted.

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[16] Leedy and Ormrod, *Practical Research,* 239-40.

[17] Leedy and Ormrod, *Practical Research,* 240.

The main limitation of this study is the sample size in relation to the population. With college enrollments numbering nearly 20 million, the number of participants is minuscule in comparison. However, there are multiple factors that reduce the overall population significantly. The total college enrollment numbers reported do not include the age of the participants. Online learning at the collegiate level has provided greater opportunities for students of all ages to enroll in secondary education. As reported by Delece Smith-Barrow in the Hechinger Report, The National Center for Education Statistics indicates that in 2018, there were nearly 9 million non-traditional learners (older than 25 years of age).[18] Participants in this study must provide their ages before they can complete the online survey. If the age of the student does not align with the parameters, between 18 and 25, the survey ends, and the responses are not recorded. Thus, the possible population for this study is decreased to 11 million.

Another factor that provides an adjustment to the overall population, is that all participants must be Christian students. The total population of students in this category is significantly less than 11 million. According to a recent poll conducted by the Young Americas Foundation and reported in the Christian Post, "Nearly 30% of high school and college students 'never' attended religious services even before the coronavirus pandemic caused many churches to cease in-person services."[19] Applying this percentage to the 11 million traditional-aged students lowers the total population for this study to approximately 3.3 million. A further reduction can be applied, as a criterion of the study requires that Christian students must attend

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[18] Delece Smith-Barrows, "Is College Enrollment Among Older Adults Increasing? Depends Who You Ask," *The Hechinger Report*, August 24, 2018, https://hechingerreport.org/is-college-enrollment-among-older-adults-increasing-depends-who-you-ask/.

[19] Ryan Foley, "Over a Quarter of College and High School Students 'Never' Attend Church, New Poll Finds," *Christian Post*, April 15, 2021, https://www.christianpost.com/news/over-one-quarter-of-young-americans-never-attend-church-poll.html.

worship or youth events at least two times per month to participate. Data from the Young Americas Foundation poll indicates that only 14% of students participating in their poll report attendance at worship once or twice a month.[20] This lowers the overall population of traditional-age (18 to 25) Christian college students who regularly attend worship to approximately 462,000 students.

A second limitation of the study is the willingness of Christian universities to permit the distribution of the survey, which could skew the data. While the goal of conducting this research is to gain responses from students of multiple denominations, the study is dependent on securing cooperation from Christian universities that are founded and based on diverse denominational and church backgrounds. While IRB approval was sought and awarded from several Christian universities, many declined to participate in the study.

A final limitation is that the survey responses rely on the student's ability to recall the frequency and content of messages that occurred in past worship services and youth events. Some students may not be able to answer the questions accurately and may choose to skip questions in the survey. To offset this possible deficit, there are questions in the survey that relate to the church's formal positions on Woke topics and the use of social media and other church literature that can be easily confirmed.

This study focuses only on students who have been exposed to the Woke agenda in their home churches through messages, denominational leanings, church or pastor social media accounts and websites, and published church literature. A delimitation of this study is noted, as there are multiple ways in which students can be impacted in their beliefs, including peer pressure, social media, television, and the student's past educational experiences. Some students

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[20] Foley, "Over a Quarter of College and High School Students."

who participate in the survey may have attended a Christian high school, or been home-schooled, while others may have attended a public institution where Woke topics are more openly discussed. As the study is designed to record data that relates solely to the role the church has had on the student's worship and witness to others, these other external influences are not addressed.

Qualifications of the Researcher

The researcher holds a Doctor of Worship Studies degree and currently serves as the Online Chair at Liberty University. The researcher serves as Subject Matter Expert in several courses (undergraduate and graduate) and has taught music courses as an adjunct at Liberty, as well as in K–12 private and public school settings. In addition, the researcher has been active in worship ministry leadership positions for over 40 years, serving in a variety of denominational backgrounds. As a Doctor of Philosophy candidate, the researcher has received training in Research Methodology coursework as part of the preparation process for this study.

Concluding Summary

The purpose of this research is to explore the impact of Woke messaging on students who regularly attended worship in their home churches before attending college. The study is based on a biblical worldview and conducted utilizing a mixed methods approach. A survey is administered to collect responses for the quantitative portion of the study. The qualitative aspect of the study was accomplished by conducting a focus group of six students, allowing the participants the opportunity to engage in deeper discussions about the impact of Woke messaging that was initiated in their home churches. As with all studies, some limitations and delimitations were noted to provide transparency to the reader. Finally, the qualifications of the

researcher are shared to indicate the academic and worship ministry experience maintained and

applied to the study.

Chapter Four: Research Findings

Introduction

The implementation of a mixed methods study allows the researcher to examine the impact of Woke religion on college-aged students regarding their worship and witness of others. Due to the multitude of underlying implications of peer relationships, social media, and other elements of culture that can influence attitudes and value systems, this study emphasizes only one aspect of the phenomena of Woke religion: messaging delivered within the Christian church via worship services, youth group gatherings, and social media. All participants in the online survey and focus group are college students between the ages of 18 and 25 and reported worship attendance of at least two or more times per month. The research incorporates quantitative data gathered through an anonymous survey and qualitative insights gained through a live focus group. The researcher utilizes comparative analysis of the information gathered, and the results are presented in a convergent parallel design, with the quantitative aspect offered first, followed by the qualitative discussion.

Assuming that the population of Christian students would be higher in Christian universities, the researcher communicated with fifteen colleges and universities that are founded on Christian principles. The researcher provided documentation outlining study purposes, Liberty University IRB approval, proposed survey questions, consent information, and recruitment flyers. Of the fifteen institutions contacted (besides Liberty University), only four responded. One declined immediately, while three indicated that further consideration was necessary. One of the remaining universities required the completion of an IRB application within their institution, and although IRB approval was granted, the university determined that the study was not a good fit for their students. The final two universities did not request IRB

applications. After a lengthy deliberation, only one of the remaining universities granted

permission for the survey to be distributed to their students. As participation was attained by only

one university in addition to Liberty, the researcher contacted numerous church denominational

conferences, megachurches, and Christian organizations with a campus presence in various

institutions. These requests garnered no responses or were denied. Attempts made to involve

local students from state institutions in the survey and a focus group were also met with

resistance. The lack of participation seems to align with concerns raised by R. Albert Mohler,

who states, "The secularization that America has largely avoided in the past is alive in its

institutions of higher learning and has finally been unleashed on the nation through many

successive generations of students who have had their worldview shaped by the secular

intellectual elites."[1] Due to the negative reception of this study by the majority of universities,

colleges, and organizations contacted the quantitative segment of the study fell short of the

planned goal of 350 participants. The final count of surveys submitted by qualified participants

in the study totaled 208 students. The lack of diversity and representation of multiple

denominations was an impediment to the study and will be evidenced in the overall findings

presented in this chapter. The data gathered in the online survey and from focus group

participants partially confirmed the researcher's assumption that the messages being delivered in

the local church have an impact on student understanding of worship and their actions in

witnessing to others about their faith. Following a review of the context and demographics of the

research, a thorough review of the quantitative and qualitative analysis is provided in this

chapter.

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[1] R. Albert Mohler Jr., *The Gathering Storm: Secularism, Culture, and the Church* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2020), 6.

Context and Demographic of the Research

Quantitative data was gathered from students through an anonymous online survey at two Christian universities. Screening questions limited participation to college students aged 18 to 25 who attended worship at least two times per month on average. Figures 2 and 3 indicate that while there is a wide range in participants' ages, most indicate a strong connection with their home churches, attending worship more than twice per month.
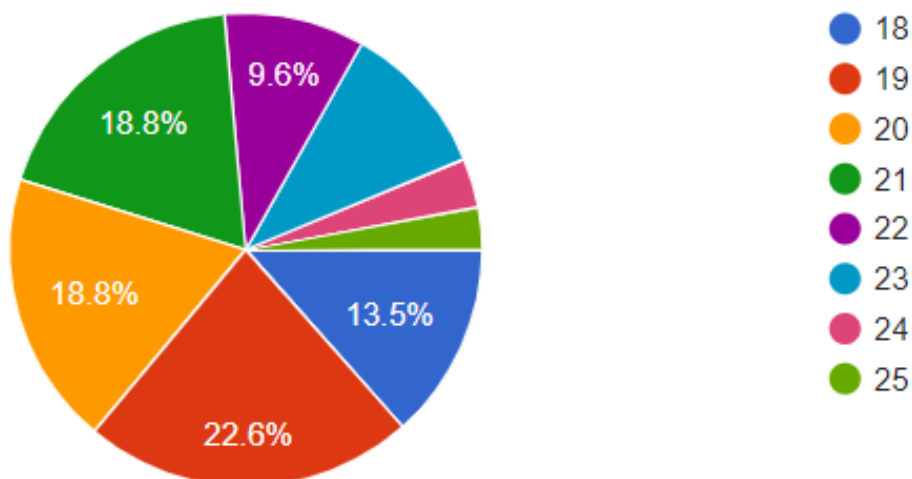
Figure 2. Survey Participants by Age
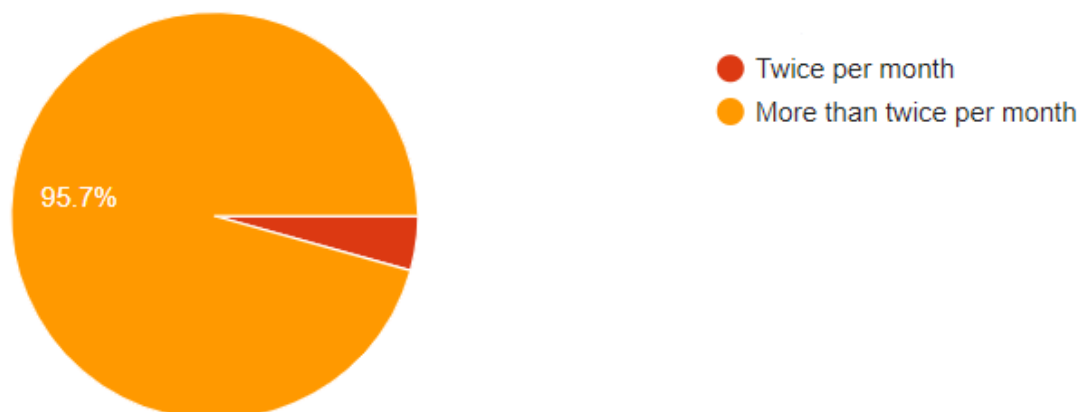
Figure 3. Survey Participant Worship Attendance

An important factor influencing the context of the study is the participant's indication of church affiliation. Of those who completed the survey, 38.2% of respondents indicate they are members of a Baptist church, 37.2% state they attend a non-denominational church, and 16.4% suggest they worshipped at a church denomination not listed in the survey question. The remaining students align with Pentecostal, Methodist, Lutheran, Presbyterian, and Catholic faiths and comprise only 8.2% of the survey responses. The breakdown of responses regarding denomination is provided in figure 4.
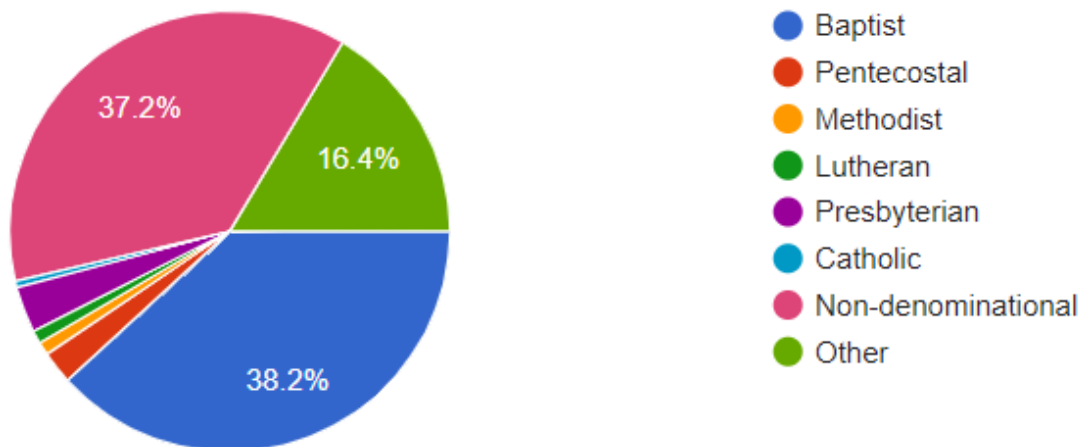
Figure 4. Survey Participant Church Affiliation

Qualitative data for the study was collected through a live focus group. As the request for participation from a local university was denied, all participants in the live focus group were Liberty University students. Participants in the focus group indicates a strong affiliation with the teachings of their home churches and noted that conservative values were consistently taught or inferred in weekly worship and youth gatherings. The homogeneity of the group resulted in responses to questions that are similar, with each student declaring affirmation of their biblical worldview regarding the secular topics presented in the discussion.

Assumptions Testing

A series of assumptions tests were conducted to assess the correlation of the data. This was accomplished by creating a scatterplot matrix to review the assumption of bivariate outliers, the assumption of linearity, and the assumption of normal distribution. Due to the large number of variables in the survey, the tests were broken down into groups of three, four, or five variables. In each case, the results of the tests indicate that the assumption of bivariate outliers is

tenable, the assumption of linearity is tenable, and the assumption of normal distribution is also

tenable. The scatter-dot matrix for each test is provided in figures 5 through 11.
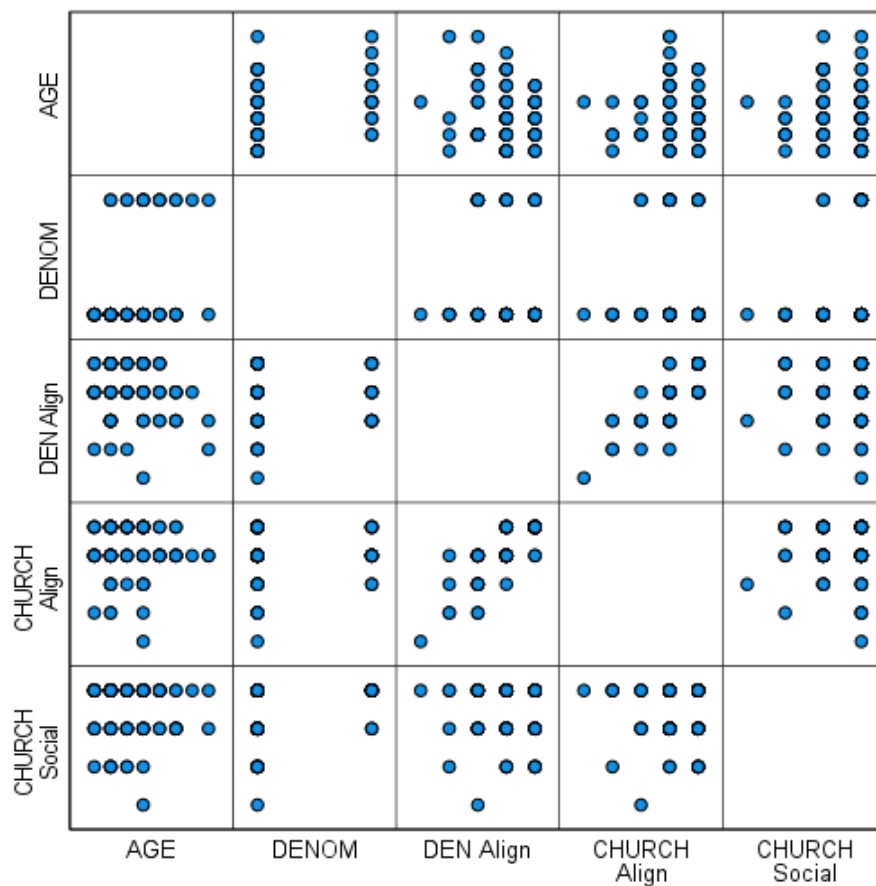
Figure 5. Correlation Assumption Scatterplot Matrix of Age, Denomination, Denominational Alignment, Church Alignment, and Church Social Media Use
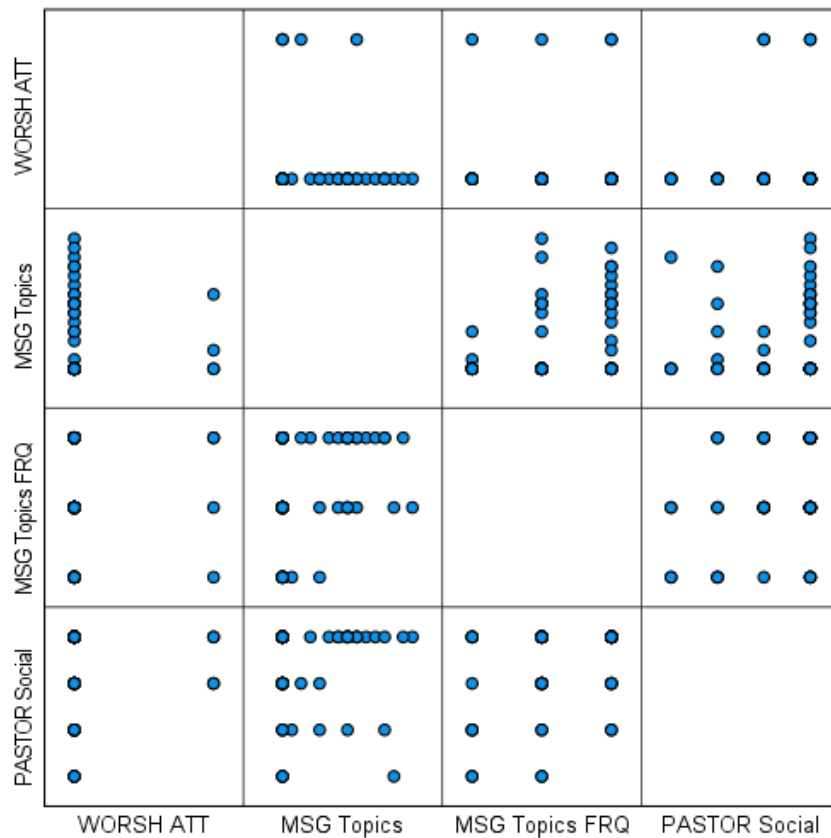
Figure 6. Correlation Assumption Scatterplot Matrix of Worship Attendance, Message Topics, Frequency of Message Topics, and Pastoral Social Media Use
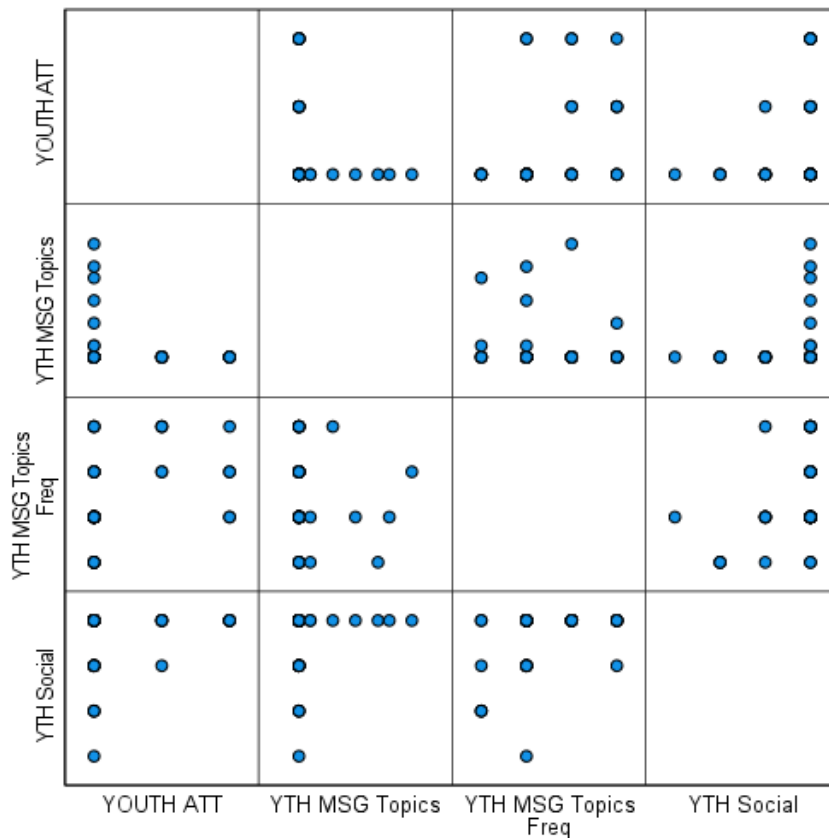
Figure 7. Correlation Assumption Scatterplot Matrix of Youth Group Attendance, Youth Message Topics, Frequency of Youth Message Topics, and Youth Pastor Social Media Use
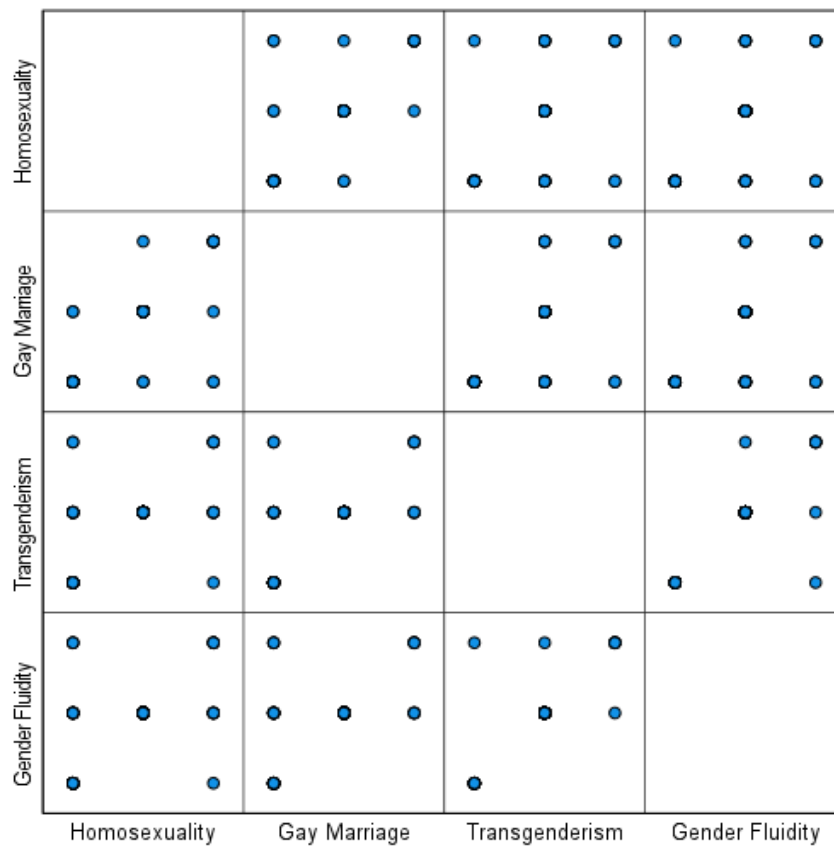
Figure 8. Correlation Assumption Scatterplot Matrix of Social Issue Topics: Homosexuality, Gay Marriage, Transgenderism, and Gender Fluidity
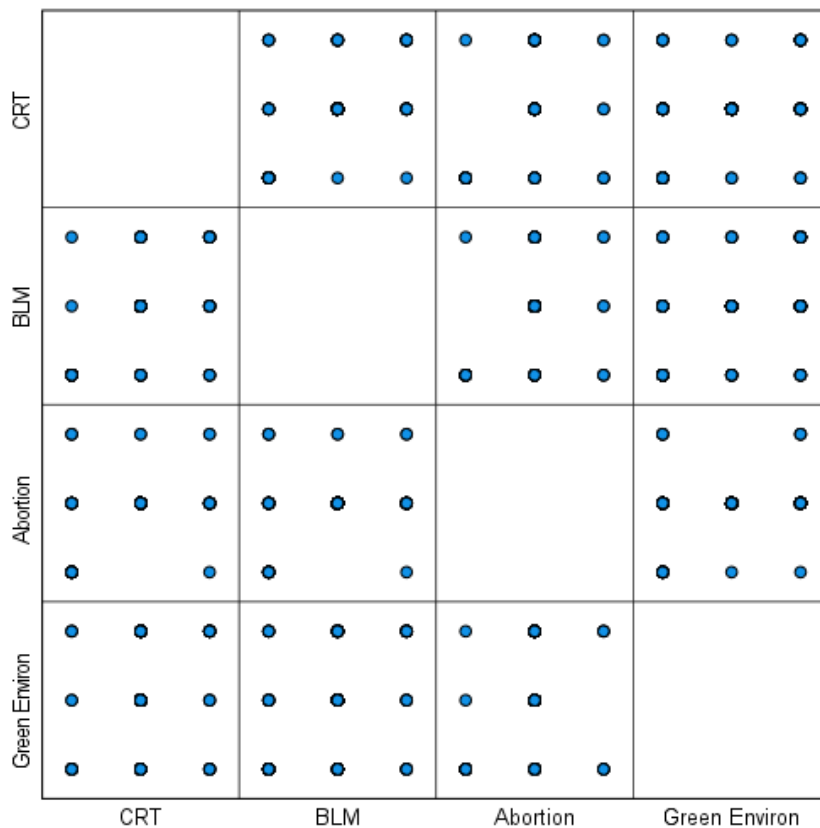
Figure 9. Correlation Assumption Scatterplot Matrix of Social Issue Topics: Critical Race Theory (CRT), Black Lives Matter (BLM), Abortion, and Green Environment
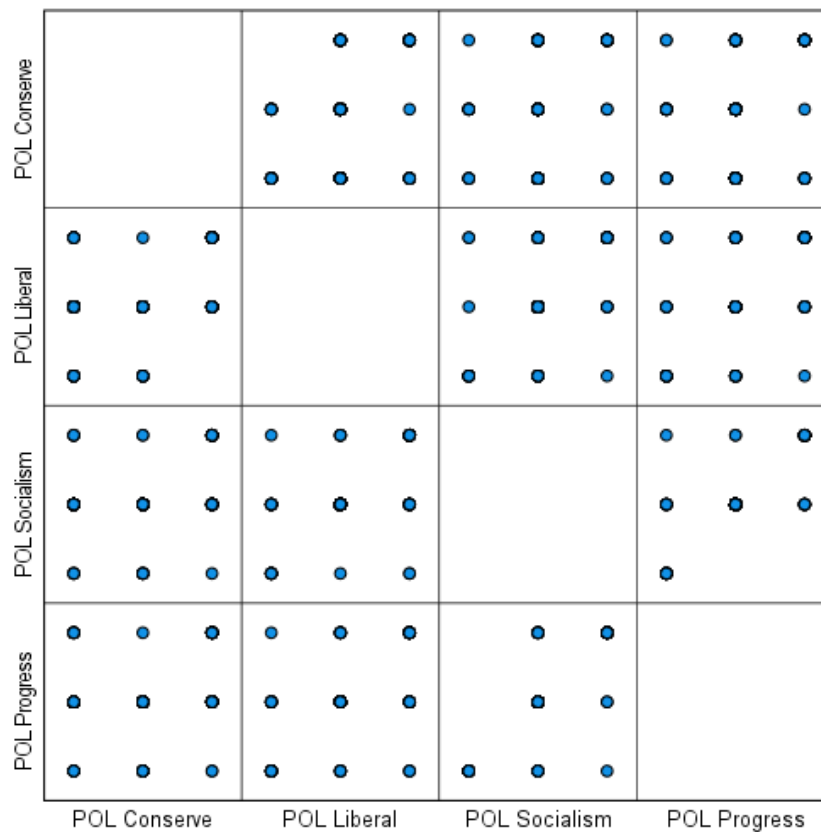
Figure 10. Correlation Assumption Scatterplot Matrix of Political Agreement: Conservatism, Liberalism, Socialism, and Progressivism
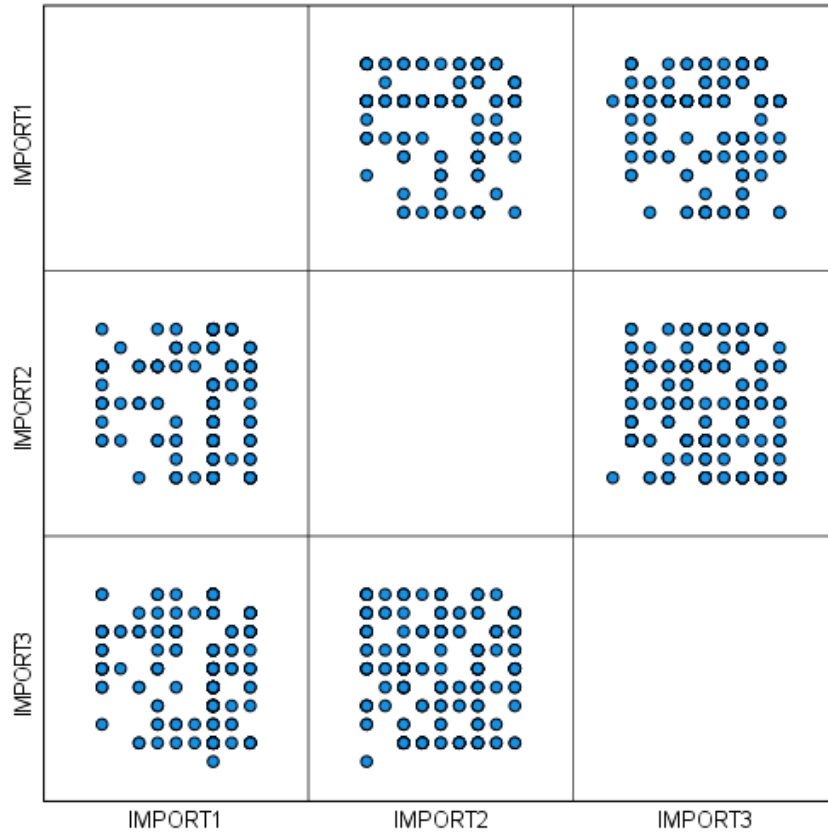
Figure 11. Correlation Assumption Scatterplot Matrix of Secular Issues: Most Important 1, Most Important 2, and Most Important 3

A second phase of assumptions testing was conducted to review the causal-comparative of outliers between groups. The test was run as a comparison of all variables in one boxplot, as well as a dissection of smaller groupings of variables to provide a clearer perspective. The results of these tests varied; however, there are several instances where the causal comparative of outliers between groups is untenable and therefore violates the assumption of outliers. These areas will be addressed as limitations in chapter 5. The boxplots for each of the comparative groups are shown in figures 12 to 19.
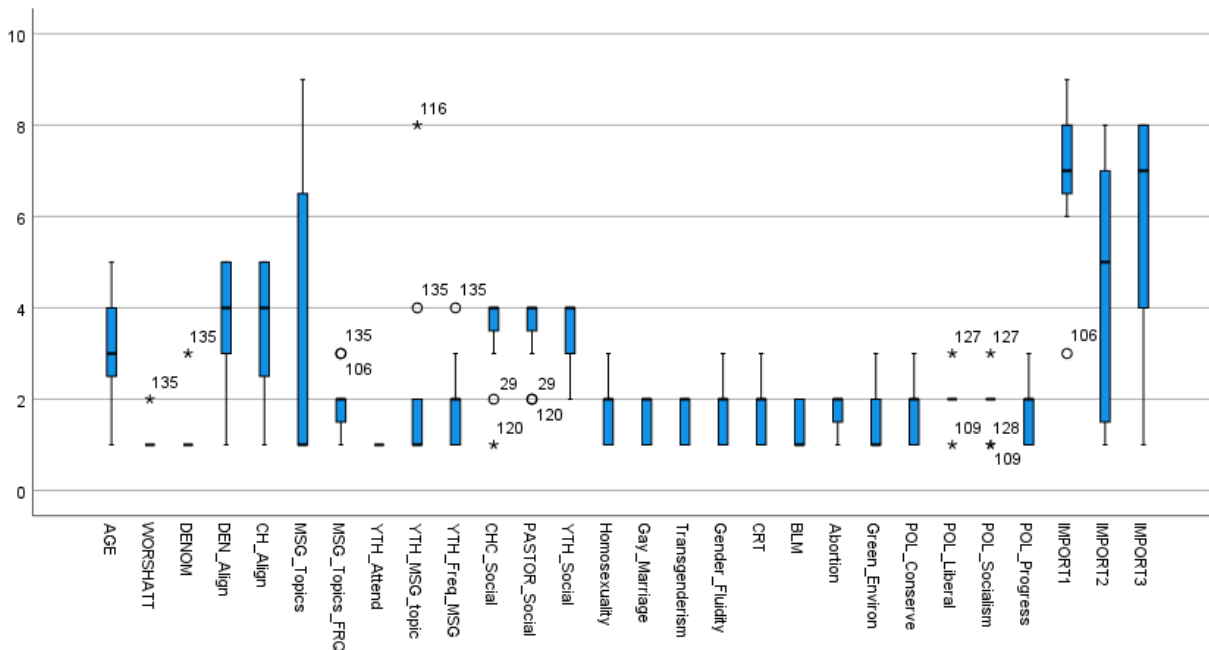
Figure 12. Causal-Comparative of Outliers: All Variables
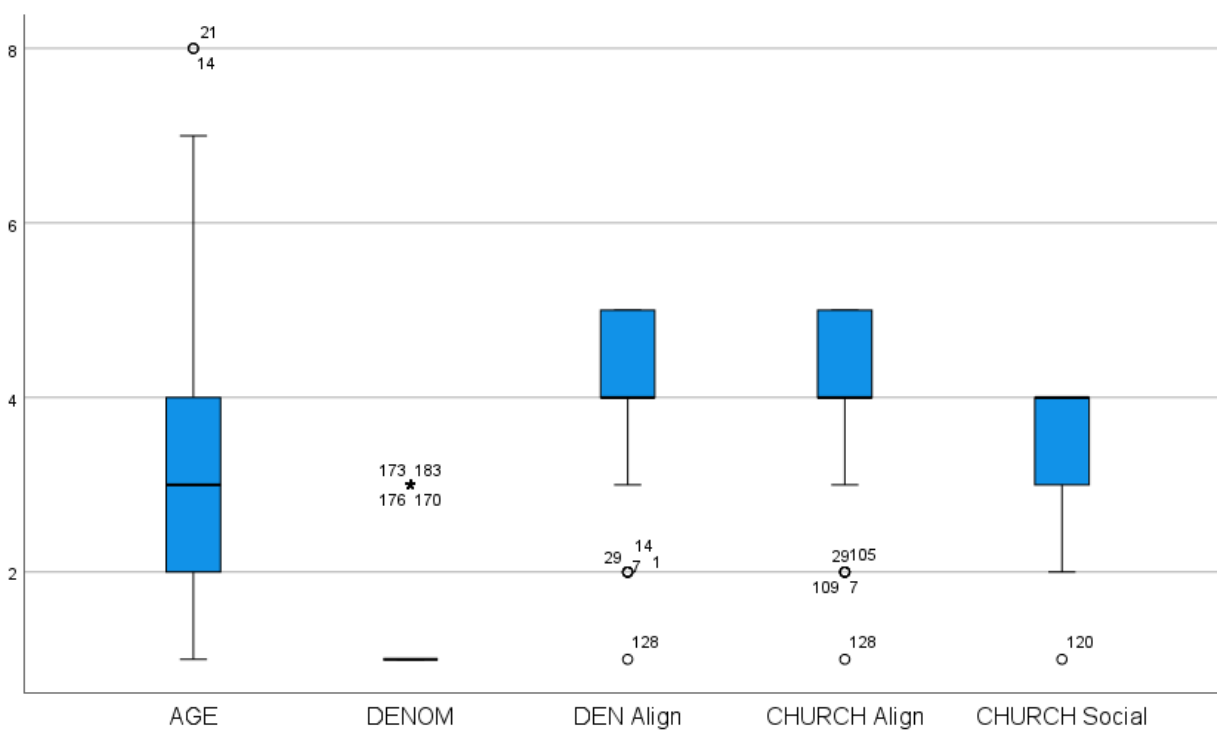
Figure 13. Causal-Comparative of Outliers: Age, Denomination, Denominational Alignment, Church Alignment, and Church Use of Social Media
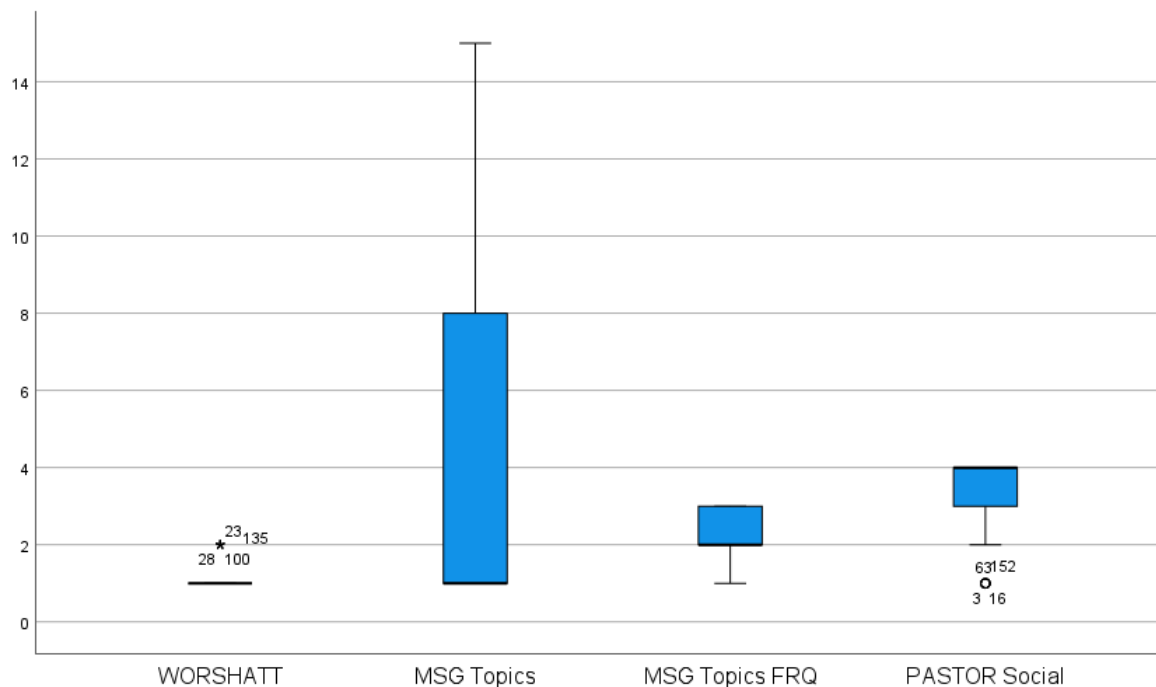
Figure 14. Causal-Comparative of Outliers: Worship Attendance, Message Topics, Frequency of Message Topics, and Pastoral Social Media Use
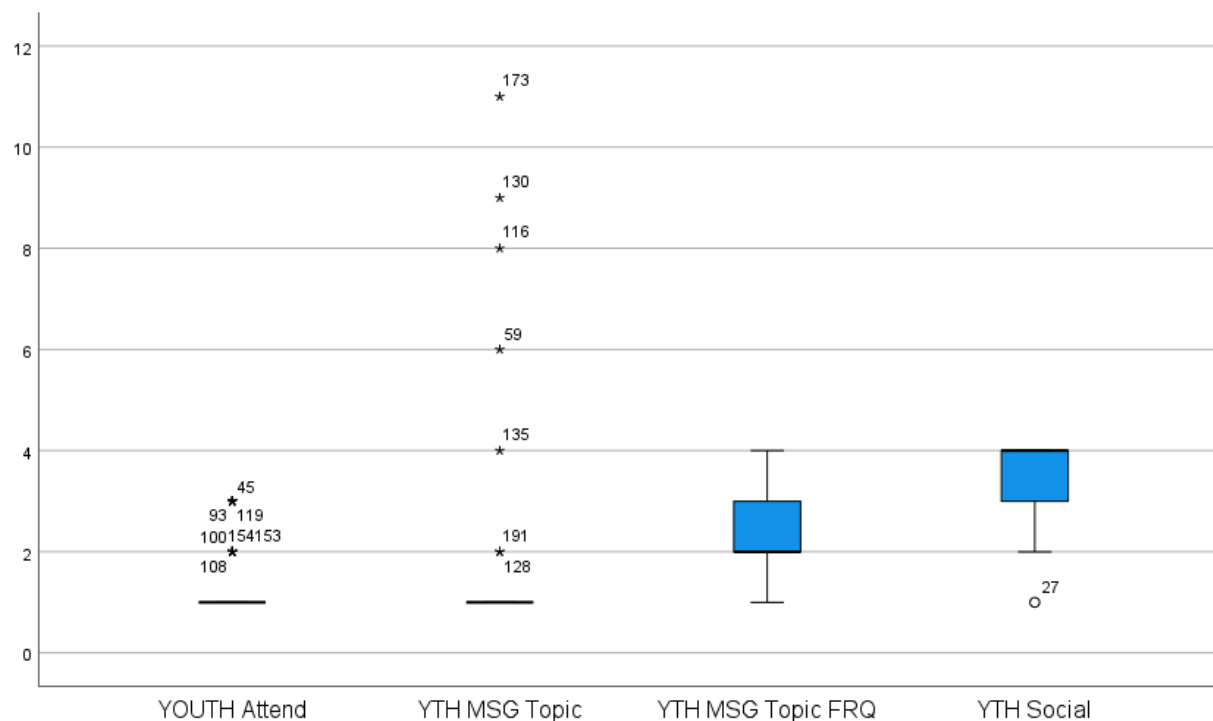
Figure 15. Causal-Comparative of Outliers: Youth Group Attendance, Youth Message Topics, Frequency of Youth Message Topics, and Youth Pastor Social Media Use
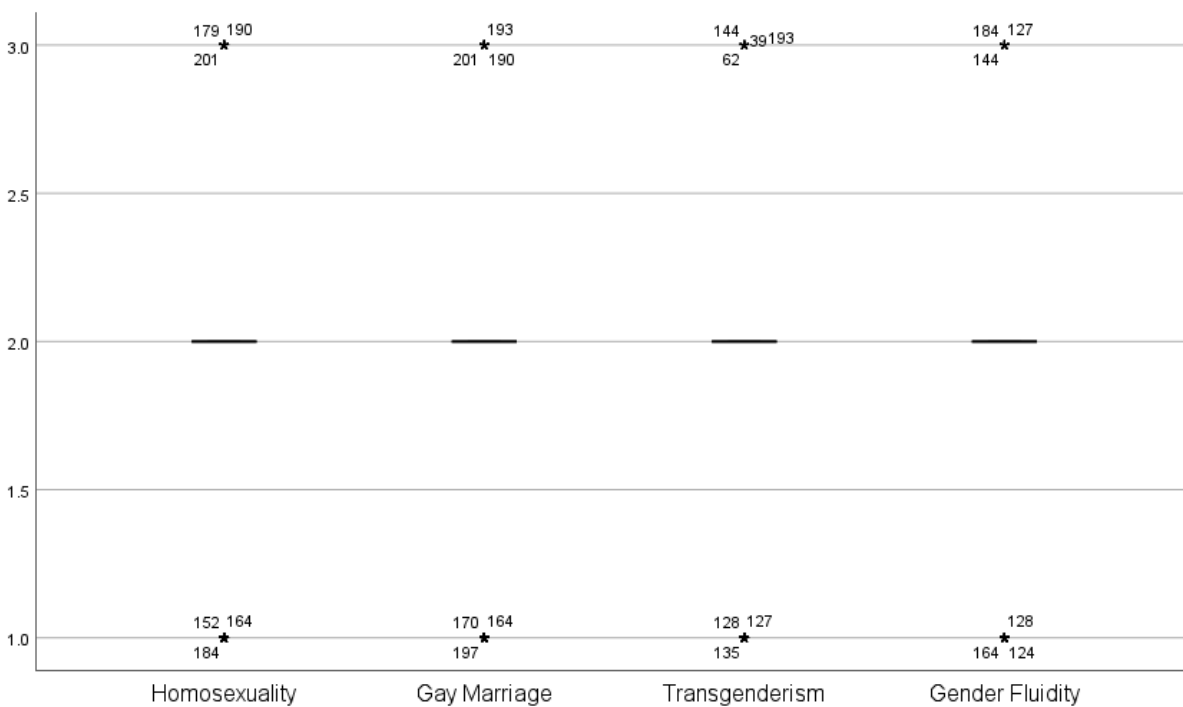
Figure 16. Causal-Comparative of Social Issue Topics: Homosexuality, Gay Marriage, Transgenderism, and Gender Fluidity
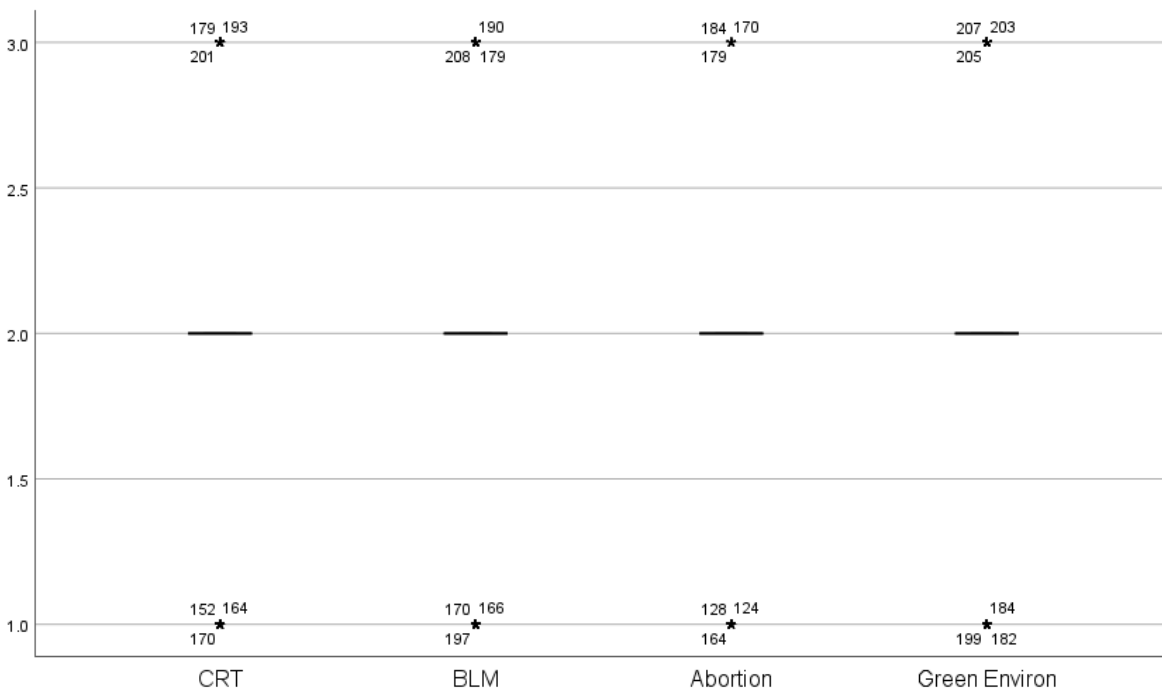
Figure 17. Causal-Comparative of Social Issue Topics: Critical Race Theory (CRT), Black Lives Matter (BLM), Abortion, and Green Environment
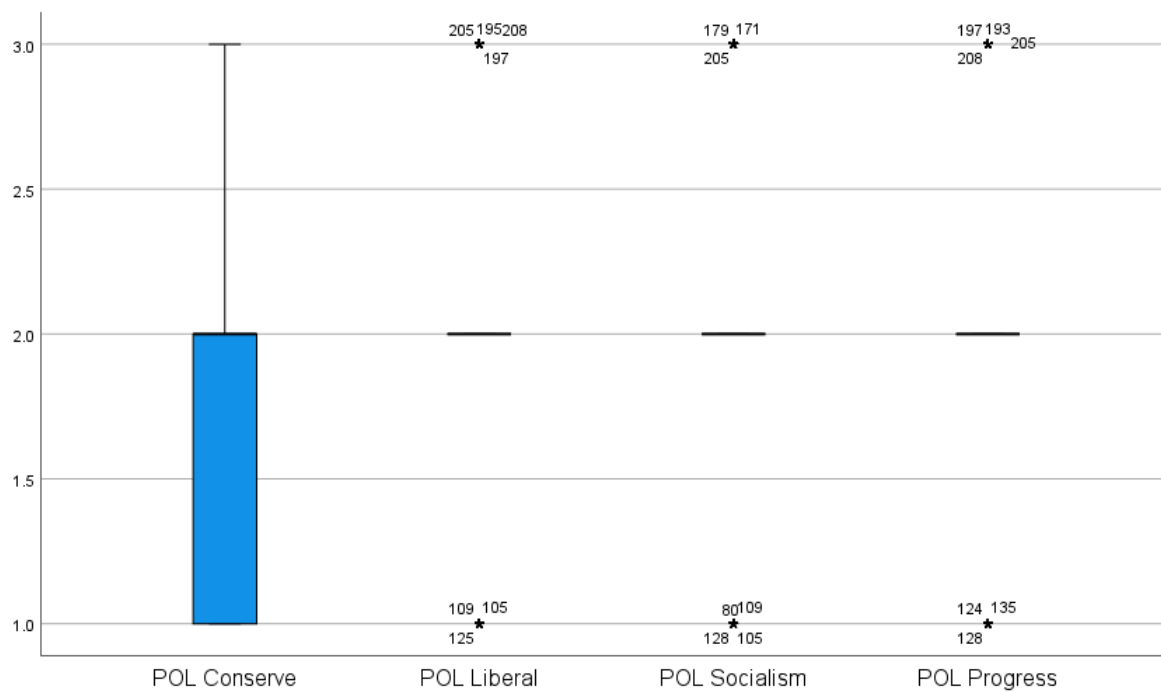
Figure 18. Causal-Comparative of Political Agreement: Conservatism, Liberalism, Socialism, and Progressivism
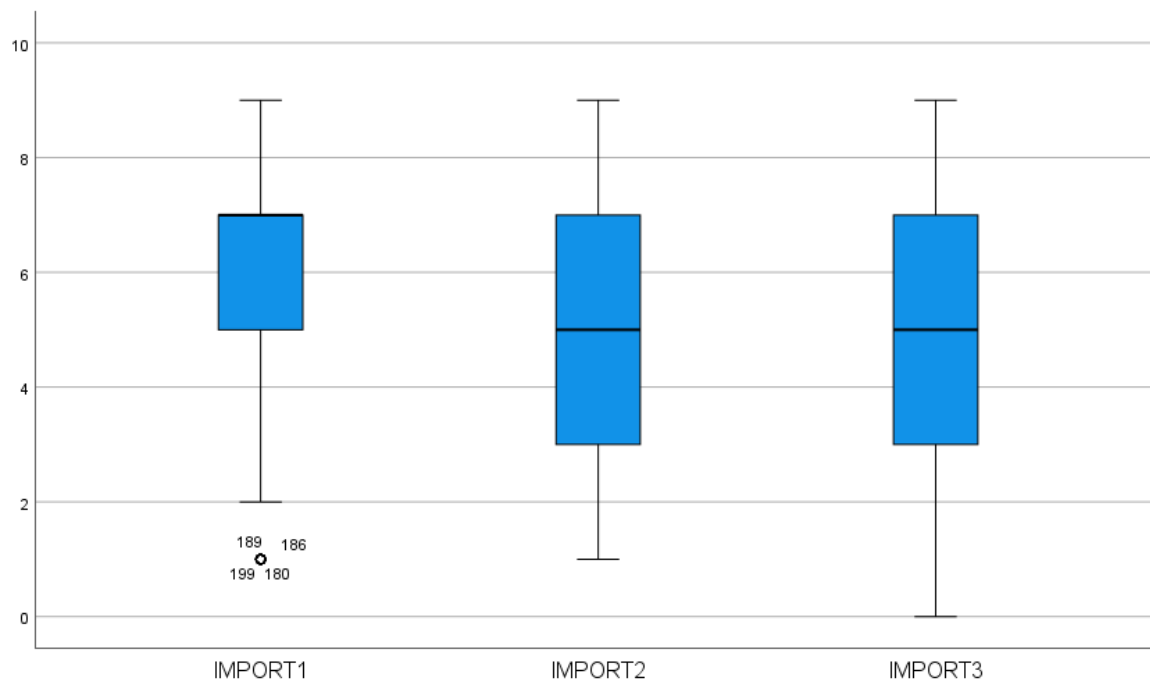
Figure 19. Causal-Comparative Secular Issues: Most Important 1, Most Important 2, and Most Important 3

A nonparametric one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov (one-sample K-S) test was selected to conduct further assumptions testing. This test was chosen instead of the Shapiro-Wilks test as the number of respondents was more than 50 students. As with previous tests, the variables were added to the one-sample K-S test in groups to provide clarity of results. In all variables, the asymptotic assumption of the normality test was significant. Therefore, the assumption of normality is violated and untenable. The results indicated data that is non-normal and will be addressed in chapter 5. The findings of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests are presented in tables 1 through 7.

Table 1. Kolmogorov-Smirnov One-Sample Test: Age, Denomination, Denominational Alignment, Church Alignment, and Church Social Media Use

			AGE	DENOM	DEN_Align	CH_Align	CHC_Social
N			208	208	97	208	180
Normal Parameters[a,b]	Mean		3.46	1.88	4.03	4.26	3.51
	Std. Deviation		1.831	.789	.895	.822	.773
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute		.153	.246	.259	.256	.392
	Positive		.153	.246	.184	.191	.264
	Negative		-.089	-.183	-.259	-.256	-.392
Test Statistic			.153	.246	.259	.256	.392
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)[c]			<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
Monte Carlo Sig. (2-tailed)[d]	Sig.		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	99% Confidence Interval	Lower Bound	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
		Upper Bound	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000

a. Test distribution is Normal.

b. Calculated from data.

c. Lilliefors Significance Correction.

d. Lilliefors' method based on 10000 Monte Carlo samples with starting seed 126474071.

Table 2. Kolmogorov-Smirnov One-Sample Test: Worship Attendance, Message Topics, Frequency of Message Topics, and Pastoral Social Media Use

|		WORSHATT	MSG_Topics	MSG_Topics_FRQ	PASTOR_Social
N		208	64	208	180
Normal Parameters[a,b]	Mean	1.04	3.91	2.24	3.49
	Std. Deviation	.204	4.181	.821	.849
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.541	.366	.228	.399
	Positive	.541	.366	.209	.274
	Negative	-.416	-.244	-.228	-.399
Test Statistic		.541	.366	.228	.399
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)[c]		<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
Monte Carlo Sig. (2-tailed)[d]	Sig.	.000	.000	.000	.000
	99% Confidence Interval — Lower Bound	.000	.000	.000	.000
	Upper Bound	.000	.000	.000	.000

a. Test distribution is Normal.

b. Calculated from data.

c. Lilliefors Significance Correction.

d. Lilliefors' method based on 10000 Monte Carlo samples with starting seed 1861419652.

Table 3. Kolmogorov-Smirnov One-Sample Test: Youth Group Attendance, Youth Message Topics, Frequency of Youth Message Topics, and Youth Pastor Social Media Use

		YTH_Attend	YTH_MSG_topic	YTH_Freq_MSG	YTH_Social
N		181	51	179	175
Normal Parameters[a,b]	Mean	1.44	2.12	2.47	3.61
	Std. Deviation	.762	2.558	.901	.659
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.443	.453	.237	.419
	Positive	.443	.453	.237	.278
	Negative	-.281	-.331	-.184	-.419
Test Statistic		.443	.453	.237	.419
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)[c]		<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
Monte Carlo Sig. (2-tailed)[d]	Sig.	.000	.000	.000	.000
	99% Confidence Interval — Lower Bound	.000	.000	.000	.000
	Upper Bound	.000	.000	.000	.000

a. Test distribution is Normal.

b. Calculated from data.

c. Lilliefors Significance Correction.

d. Lilliefors' method based on 10000 Monte Carlo samples with starting seed 442399356.

Table 4. Kolmogorov-Smirnov One-Sample Test: Social Issue Topics: Homosexuality, Gay Marriage, Transgenderism, and Gender Fluidity

			Homosexuality	Gay_Marriage	Transgenderism	Gender_Fluidity
N			208	208	208	208
Normal Parameters[a,b]	Mean		1.92	1.90	1.94	1.95
	Std. Deviation		.415	.410	.336	.337
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute		.448	.458	.482	.475
	Positive		.374	.364	.403	.410
	Negative		-.448	-.458	-.482	-.475
Test Statistic			.448	.458	.482	.475
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)[c]			<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
Monte Carlo Sig. (2-tailed)[d]	Sig.		.000	.000	.000	.000
	99% Confidence Interval	Lower Bound	.000	.000	.000	.000
		Upper Bound	.000	.000	.000	.000

a. Test distribution is Normal.

b. Calculated from data.

c. Lilliefors Significance Correction.

d. Lilliefors' method based on 10000 Monte Carlo samples with starting seed 1421288173.

Table 5. Kolmogorov-Smirnov One-Sample Test: Social Issue Topics: Critical Race Theory (CRT), Black Lives Matter (BLM), Abortion, and Green Environment

			CRT	BLM	Abortion	Green_Environ
N			208	208	208	208
Normal Parameters[a,b]	Mean		1.97	1.93	1.96	1.99
	Std. Deviation		.481	.520	.330	.684
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute		.394	.382	.475	.268
	Positive		.375	.344	.414	.266
	Negative		-.394	-.382	-.475	-.268
Test Statistic			.394	.382	.475	.268
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)[c]			<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
Monte Carlo Sig. (2-tailed)[d]	Sig.		.000	.000	.000	.000
	99% Confidence Interval	Lower Bound	.000	.000	.000	.000
		Upper Bound	.000	.000	.000	.000

a. Test distribution is Normal.

b. Calculated from data.

c. Lilliefors Significance Correction.

d. Lilliefors' method based on 10000 Monte Carlo samples with starting seed 1644650155.

Table 6. Kolmogorov-Smirnov One-Sample Test: Political Agreement: Conservatism, Liberalism, Socialism, and Progressivism

			POL_Conserve	POL_Liberal	POL_Socialism	POL_Progress
N			208	208	208	208
Normal Parameters[a,b]	Mean		1.77	2.08	2.07	2.05
	Std. Deviation		.794	.518	.412	.484
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute		.287	.385	.445	.399
	Positive		.287	.385	.445	.399
	Negative		-.165	-.341	-.382	-.365
Test Statistic			.287	.385	.445	.399
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)[c]			<.001	<.001	<.001	<.001
Monte Carlo Sig. (2-tailed)[d]	Sig.		.000	.000	.000	.000
	99% Confidence Interval	Lower Bound	.000	.000	.000	.000
		Upper Bound	.000	.000	.000	.000

a. Test distribution is Normal.

b. Calculated from data.

c. Lilliefors Significance Correction.

d. Lilliefors' method based on 10000 Monte Carlo samples with starting seed 698493861.

Table 7. Kolmogorov-Smirnov One-Sample Test: Secular Issues: Most Important 1, Most Important 2, and Most Important 3

			IMPORT1	IMPORT2	IMPORT3
N			208	208	208
Normal Parameters[a,b]	Mean		6.18	4.73	4.97
	Std. Deviation		2.280	2.549	2.560
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute		.343	.150	.123
	Positive		.167	.150	.098
	Negative		-.343	-.135	-.123
Test Statistic			.343	.150	.123
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)[c]			<.001	<.001	<.001
Monte Carlo Sig. (2-tailed)[d]	Sig.		.000	.000	.000
	99% Confidence Interval	Lower Bound	.000	.000	.000
		Upper Bound	.000	.000	.000

a. Test distribution is Normal.

b. Calculated from data.

c. Lilliefors Significance Correction.

d. Lilliefors' method based on 10000 Monte Carlo samples with starting seed 745618922.

The final assumptions test employed on the data was Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variance. This test offers a comparison of the homogeneity of variances within and across all variables. Results indicate that in several of the variables, the significance is less than .05, so the population is not equal in those variables. Thus, the assumption of equal variance is violated in some variables, as indicated in the results of Levene's Test of Quality of Error Variance. The results of this test are shown in table 8. Variables in which the assumption is violated appear in bold print. As with the previous assumptions testing, the violations the Levene's Test of Error Variance will be addressed in chapter 5.

Table 8. Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variance

Variable Title		Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
WRSHP Atten	**Based on Mean**	**6.507**	**7**	**200**	**<.001**
DENOM	Based on Mean	1.744	7	200	.101
DEN Align	Based on Mean	0.796	6	89	.576
CHURCH Align	Based on Mean	1.608	7	200	.135
MSG Topics (Pastor)	**Based on Mean**	**2.287**	**7**	**56**	**.040**
MSG Topics Frequency	Based on Mean	0.428	7	200	.884
YOUTH Group Attend	**Based on Mean**	**2.911**	**7**	**173**	**.007**
YOUTH MSG Topic	**Based on Mean**	**3.653**	**6**	**43**	**.005**
YOUTH MSG Topics Frequency	**Based on Mean**	**2.588**	**7**	**171**	**.015**
CHURCH Social	Based on Mean	1.175	7	172	.320
PASTOR Social	**Based on Mean**	**2.472**	**7**	**172**	**.019**
YTH Social	**Based on Mean**	**3.929**	**7**	**167**	**<.001**
Homosexuality	**Based on Mean**	**3.761**	**7**	**200**	**<.001**
Gay Marriage	**Based on Mean**	**3.773**	**7**	**200**	**<.001**
Transgenderism	**Based on Mean**	**2.872**	**7**	**200**	**.007**
Gender Fluidity	**Based on Mean**	**3.230**	**7**	**200**	**.003**
CRT	Based on Mean	1.639	7	200	.126

BLM	**Based on Mean**	**2.433**	**7**	**200**	**.021**
Abortion	**Based on Mean**	**4.786**	**7**	**200**	**<.001**
Green Environ	Based on Mean	1.188	7	200	.311
POL Conserve	Based on Mean	0.407	7	200	.897
POL Liberal	Based on Mean	0.358	7	200	.926
POL Socialism	**Based on Mean**	**2.596**	**7**	**200**	**.014**
POL Progress	Based on Mean	0.450	7	200	.869
IMPORT1	**Based on Mean**	**2.650**	**7**	**200**	**.012**
IMPORT2	Based on Mean	0.826	7	200	.566
IMPORT3	Based on Mean	0.540	7	200	.804

Quantitative Results

Quantitative data were gathered by means of an online anonymous survey. A total of 265 surveys were submitted; however, some students opted not to participate, and others were disqualified as part of the screening questions. This resulted in a final count of 208 completed surveys by college students who met the age requirement and attended worship at least two times per month on average. A Pearson product-moment correlation analysis exhibited significant relationships across many of the questions discussed in the survey. The results of the correlation were categorized by topic and exhibited in table 9.

Table 9. Pearson Correlation

Question Topic	Pearson Correlation	*significant at .05 level ** significant at .01 level*	
Age			
Denomination	.167	.016	Weak*
Denominational Alignment	-.233	.022	Weak*
Church Has Youth Group	.176	.011	Weak*
Worship Attendance			

Youth Attendance	.185	.013	Weak*
Homosexuality	.156	.024	Weak*

Denomination

Church Use of Social Media	.148	.048	Weak*

Denominational Alignment

Church Alignment	.807	<001	Strong**
Homosexuality	.315	.002	Moderate**
Gay Marriage	.257	.011	Weak*
Critical Race Theory	.234	.021	Weak*
Black Lives Matter	.297	.003	Weak**
Abortion	.249	.014	Weak*
Green Agenda/Environment	.345	<001	Moderate**
Political Ideology: Socialism	.226	.016	Weak*
Political Ideology: Progressivism	.262	.009	Weak**

Church Alignment

Homosexuality	.275	<001	Weak**
Gay Marriage	.278	<001	Weak**
Transgenderism	.300	<001	Moderate**
Gender Fluidity	.272	<001	Weak**
Critical Race Theory	.239	<001	Weak**
Black Lives Matter	.360	<001	Moderate**
Abortion	.273	<001	Weak**
Green Agenda/Environment	.367	<001	Moderate**
Political Ideology: Socialism	.219	.001	Weak**
Political Ideology: Progressivism	.269	<001	Weak**

Pastoral Message Topics

Message Topic Frequency	.417	<001	Moderate**
Critical Race Theory	-.381	.002	Moderate**
Black Lives Matter	-.277	.026	Weak*
Political Ideology: Conservatism	.325	.009	Moderate**
Political Ideology: Liberalism	.252	.045	Weak*
Political Ideology: Socialism	.271	.030	Weak*

Pastoral Message Frequency

Youth Group Message Frequency	.449	<001	Moderate**
Church Use of Social Media	.312	<001	Moderate**
Pastor Use of Social Media	.242	.001	Weak**
Youth Pastor use of Social Media	.218	.004	Weak**
Political Ideology: Socialism	.153	.027	Weak*

Church Has Youth Group

Youth Pastor Message Topic	.278	.048	Weak*

Youth Group Attendance

Youth Group Message Frequency	.224	.003	Weak**

Youth Group Message Topics

3rd Most Important Topic	.284	.043	Weak*

Youth Group Message Frequency

Youth Pastor Use of Social Media	.235	.002	Weak**
Transgenderism	.154	.039	Weak*
Political Ideology: Progressivism	.160	.032	Weak*
2nd Most Important Topic	.185	.013	Weak*

Church Use of Social Media

Pastor Use of Social Media	.595	<001	Moderate**
Youth Pastor Use of Social Media	.616	<001	Moderate**
Homosexuality	.234	.002	Weak**
Gay Marriage	.188	.012	Weak*
Transgenderism	.166	.026	Weak*
Critical Race Theory	.195	.009	Weak**

Pastor Use of Social Media

Youth Pastor Use of Social Media	.553	<001	Moderate**

Homosexuality

Gay Marriage	.803	<001	Strong**
Transgenderism	.591	<001	Moderate**
Gender Fluidity	.525	<001	Moderate**
Critical Race Theory	.424	<001	Moderate**
Black Lives Matter	.353	<001	Moderate**
Abortion	.503	<001	Moderate**
Green Agenda/Environment	.251	<001	Weak**
Political Ideology: Liberalism	.233	<001	Weak**
Political Ideology: Socialism	.202	.003	Weak**
Political Ideology: Progressivism	.335	<001	Moderate**

Gay Marriage

Transgenderism	.659	<001	Moderate**
Gender Fluidity	.593	<001	Moderate**
Critical Race Theory	.499	<001	Moderate**

Black Lives Matter	.419	<001	Moderate**
Abortion	.431	<001	Moderate**
Green Agenda/Environment	.373	<001	Moderate**
Political Ideology: Liberalism	.175	.011	Weak*
Political Ideology: Socialism	.183	.008	Weak**
Political Ideology: Progressivism	.343	<001	Moderate**
1st Important Topic	.192	.005	Weak**

Transgenderism

Gender Fluidity	.872	<001	Strong**
Critical Race Theory	.469	<001	Moderate**
Black Lives Matter	.419	<001	Moderate**
Abortion	.544	<001	Moderate**
Green Agenda/Environment	.333	<001	Moderate**
Political Ideology: Liberalism	.249	<001	Weak**
Political Ideology: Socialism	.308	<001	Moderate**
Political Ideology: Progressivism	.495	<001	Moderate**

Gender Fluidity

Critical Race Theory	.409	<001	Moderate**
Black Lives Matter	.366	<001	Moderate**
Abortion	.588	<001	Moderate**
Green Agenda/Environment	.269	<001	Weak**
Political Ideology: Liberalism	.271	<001	Weak**
Political Ideology: Socialism	.372	<001	Moderate**
Political Ideology: Progressivism	.579	<001	Moderate**

Critical Race Theory

Black Lives Matter	.552	<001	Moderate**
Abortion	.387	<001	Moderate**
Green Agenda/Environment	.366	<001	Moderate**
Political Ideology: Liberalism	.242	<001	Weak**
Political Ideology: Socialism	.376	<001	Moderate**
Political Ideology: Progressivism	.464	<001	Moderate**

Black Lives Matter

Abortion	.347	<001	Moderate**
Green Agenda/Environment	.350	<001	Moderate**
Political Ideology: Liberalism	.291	<001	Weak**
Political Ideology: Socialism	.294	<001	Weak**
Political Ideology: Progressivism	.400	<001	Moderate**

Abortion

Green Agenda/Environment	.254	<001	Weak**
Political Ideology: Liberalism	.218	.002	Weak**
Political Ideology: Socialism	.270	<001	Weak**
Political Ideology: Progressivism	.468	<001	Moderate**
Green Agenda/Environment			
Political Ideology: Liberalism	.357	<001	Moderate**
Political Ideology: Socialism	.209	.002	Weak**
Political Ideology: Progressivism	.323	<001	Moderate**
1st Important	-.166	.017	Weak*
2nd Important	-.240	<001	Weak**
Political Ideology: Conservatism			
Political Ideology: Liberalism	.421	<001	Moderate**
Political Ideology: Socialism	.313	<001	Moderate**
Political Ideology: Progressivism	.270	<001	Weak**
Political Ideology: Liberalism			
Political Ideology: Socialism	.540	<001	Moderate**
Political Ideology: Progressivism	.542	<001	Moderate**
Political Ideology: Socialism			
Political Ideology: Progressivism	.759	<001	Strong**
1st Important Topic			
2nd Important Topic	.200	.004	Weak**

The online survey data indicate multiple instances of significant relationships across various categories, most of which presented as weak. While most of the categories analyzed from the survey show a positive correlation, there are several that identified as negative. The relationship between age and denomination shows a weak but significant relationship with a denomination; however, the relationship between age and alignment with denominational stances is weak and negative. Similarly, a negative relationship is noted between the delivery of pastoral message topics on the secular issues of CRT (-.381**) and BLM (-.277*). The only other connection point that trended negatively was the relationship between the topic of affirming or

disputing the secular issue of a Green Agenda/Green Environment and the selection of the first and second most important topics (-.166* and -.240** respectively).

A key focus of the online study is the various types of messages being delivered on the secular topics of the study, including homosexuality, gay marriage, transgenderism, gender fluidity, CRT, BLM, abortion, green agenda/environment, and political ideology. Alignment with messaging is viewed from the perspective of the local church and the denomination. For those responding positively to aligning with their denominational teachings, a strong correlation is noted for church alignment as well (.807**). A review of the impact of church messaging, whether in sermons delivered by the pastor, topics discussed at youth group gatherings, or in the use of social media, revealed more moderate relationships. The presence of pastoral messaging on secular topics exhibits a moderate relationship to the frequency of those messages (.417**), as well as the political ideology of conservatism (.325**). Comparably, moderate relationships are noted between the frequency of pastoral messages and youth group messages (.449**) as well as pastoral messages and church use of social media to present the stated social topics (.312**). The connectivity in messaging with moderate relationships continues, as seen in the use of church social media with that of the pastor (.595**) and the youth pastor (.616**). This trend continues with a moderate relationship between the use of social media by the pastor and the youth pastor (.553**).

In the survey, participants were asked to assign a ranking to secular topics, selecting either 1) Affirm the topic and believe that it should be accepted in society; 2) Dispute the topic and believe that it is negatively impacting society; or 3) unsure. Notably, the secular topics each showed a significant relationship with one another. A moderate relationship is observed most frequently and is strengthened between topics that are similar such as homosexuality and gay

marriage (.803**), transgenderism and gender fluidity (.872**), and CRT and BLM (.552**).

The topic of abortion indicates a moderate relationship to all other secular issues except the

Green Agenda and political ideology. Weak to moderate relationships are also reflected between

the Green Agenda and all other secular issues except political ideology. Correlation results

related to political ideology and the various secular topics also exhibit a pattern of moderate

relationship with progressivism, each at a .01 significance. Similar patterns are noted among

other secular topics and political ideologies, as well as between political ideologies.

Another remarkable finding is the significant relationship between church alignment and

each of the secular topics presented in the survey, with BLM and the green agenda showing more

moderate significance. These results suggest that participants, whether they affirm or dispute a

topic, tend to affirm all or dispute all; however, a review of the standard deviation indicates less

homogeneity of responses on the topics of Critical Race, BLM, and the Green Agenda which is a

consistent theme throughout the data collected as part of the quantitative analysis. These trends

are exhibited in table 10 and figure 20, both of which clearly show an increase in students who

were unsure about these topics.

Table 10. Standard Deviation of Key Secular Topics

Topic	Mean	Std. Deviation
Homosexuality	1.92	0.415
Gay Marriage	1.90	0.410
Transgenderism	1.94	0.336
Gender Fluidity	1.95	0.337
CRT	1.97	**0.481**
BLM	1.93	**0.520**
Abortion	1.96	0.330
Green Environ	1.99	**0.684**
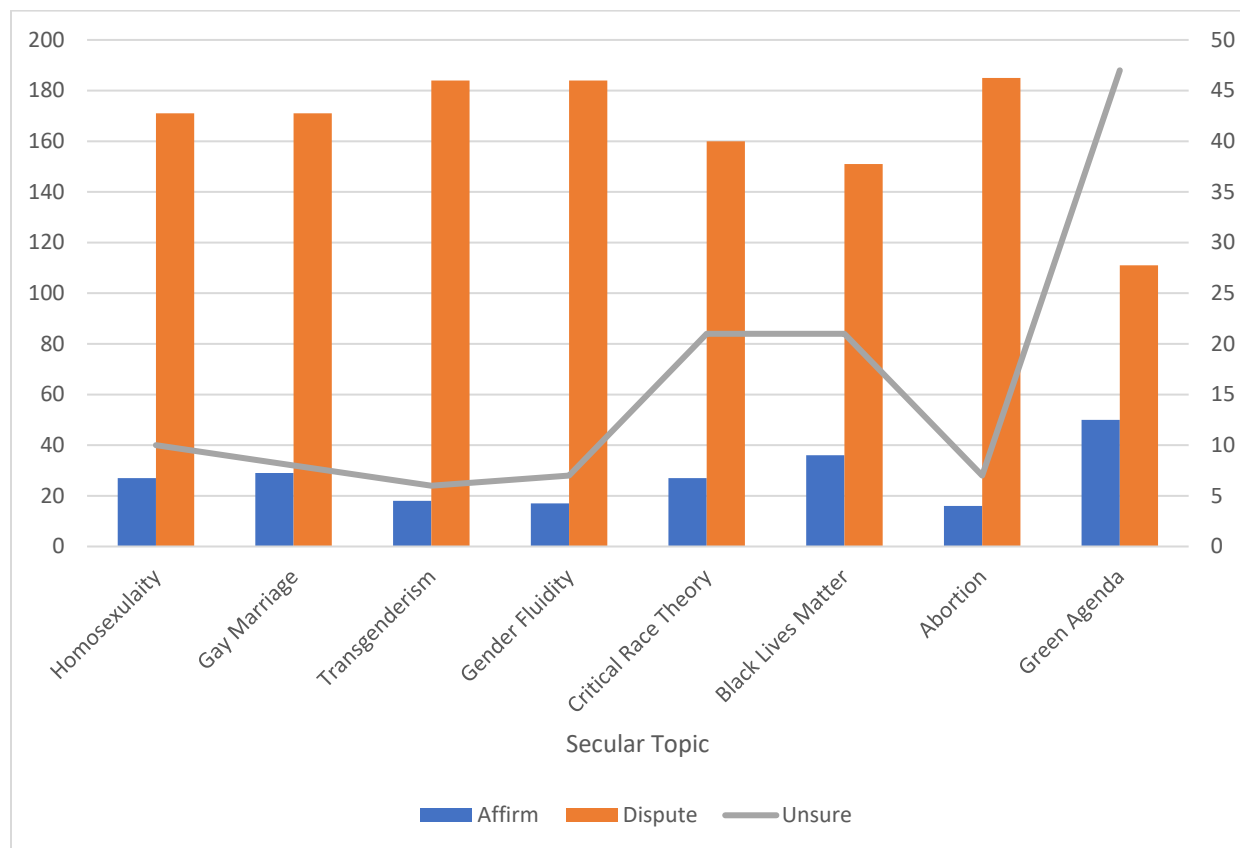
Figure 20. Variability of "Unsure" Responses

The information in figure 20 allows an overall view of responses that affirm, dispute or are unsure of their stance on secular topics from all participants. Figures 21 through 23 provide a breakdown of this data into charts that compare responses by students as they aligned with church affiliation. The number of students aligned with the Baptist tradition (38%) is similar to those who selected Non-denominational (37%). In all categories, those aligned with the Non-denominational church submitted more responses to affirm the secular topics than those submitted by Baptist students. It is also noted that the Green Agenda is an area in which all students show an increase in concern, with higher numbers that affirm this topic across Baptist, Non-denominational, and those assigned to the category of other.
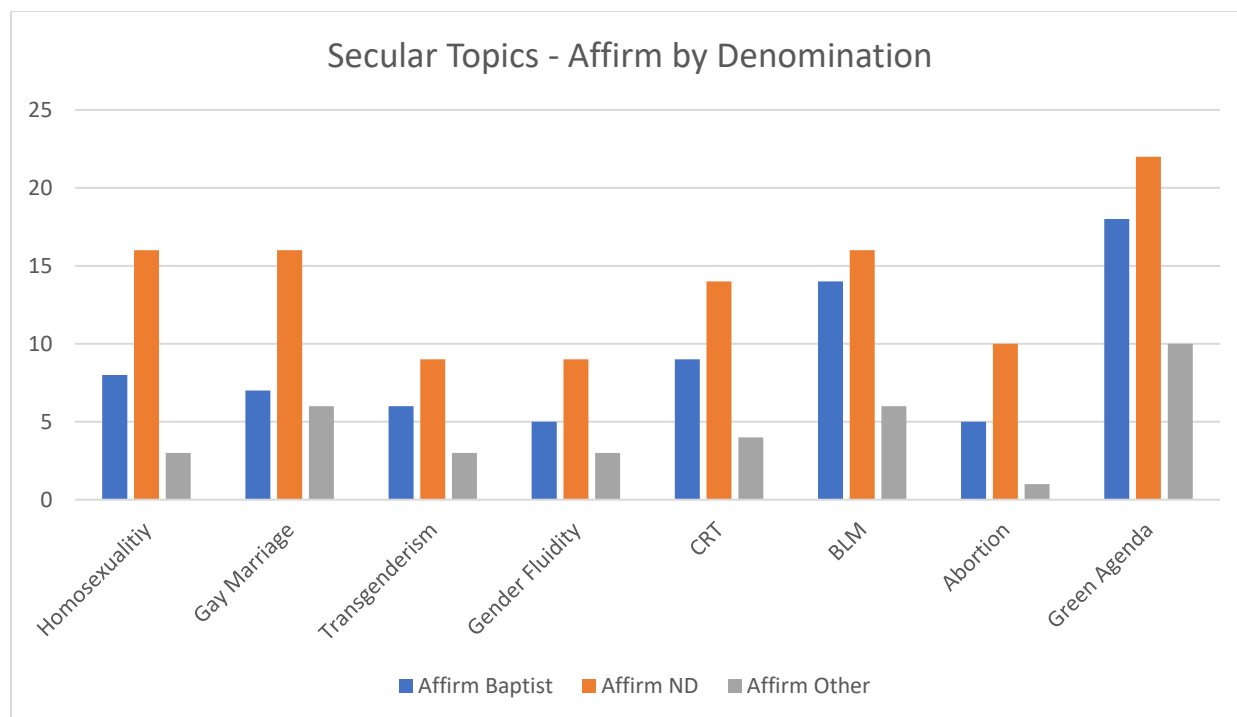
Figure 21. Secular Topics – Affirm by Denomination
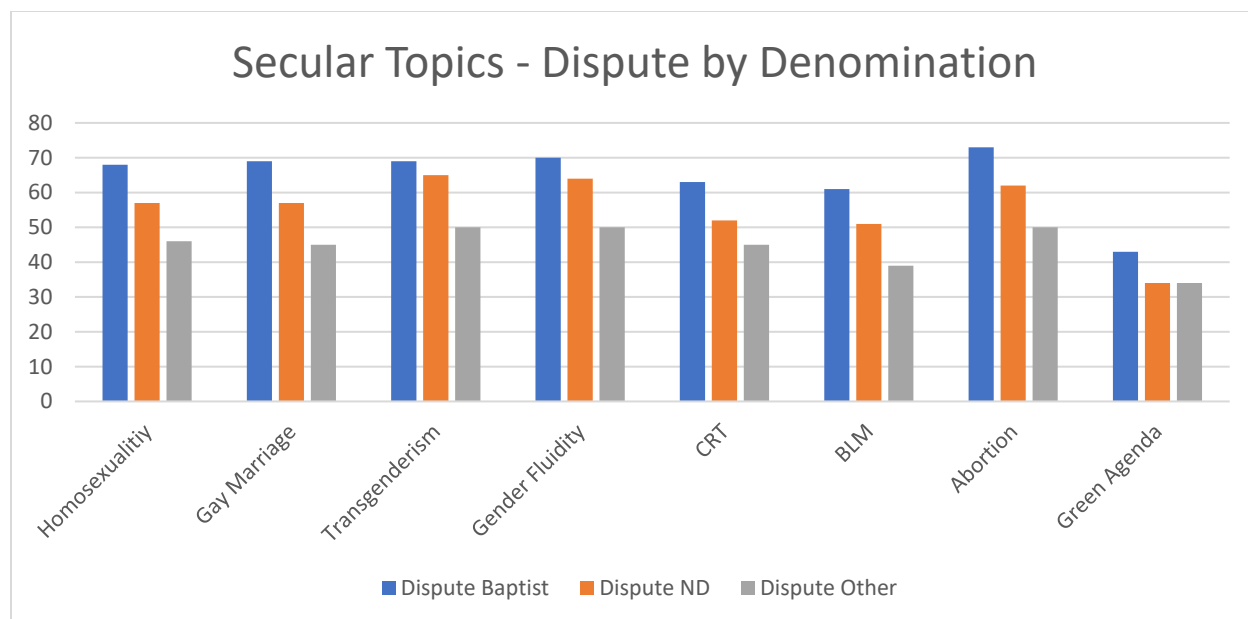
Figure 22. Secular Topics – Dispute by Denomination

In Figure 23 below, the data confirms insight shared above in figure 20 regarding the variability of responses for Green Agenda, CRT, and BLM. This figure also provides insight into the unsure responses across all topics as submitted by students in each category for church affiliation.
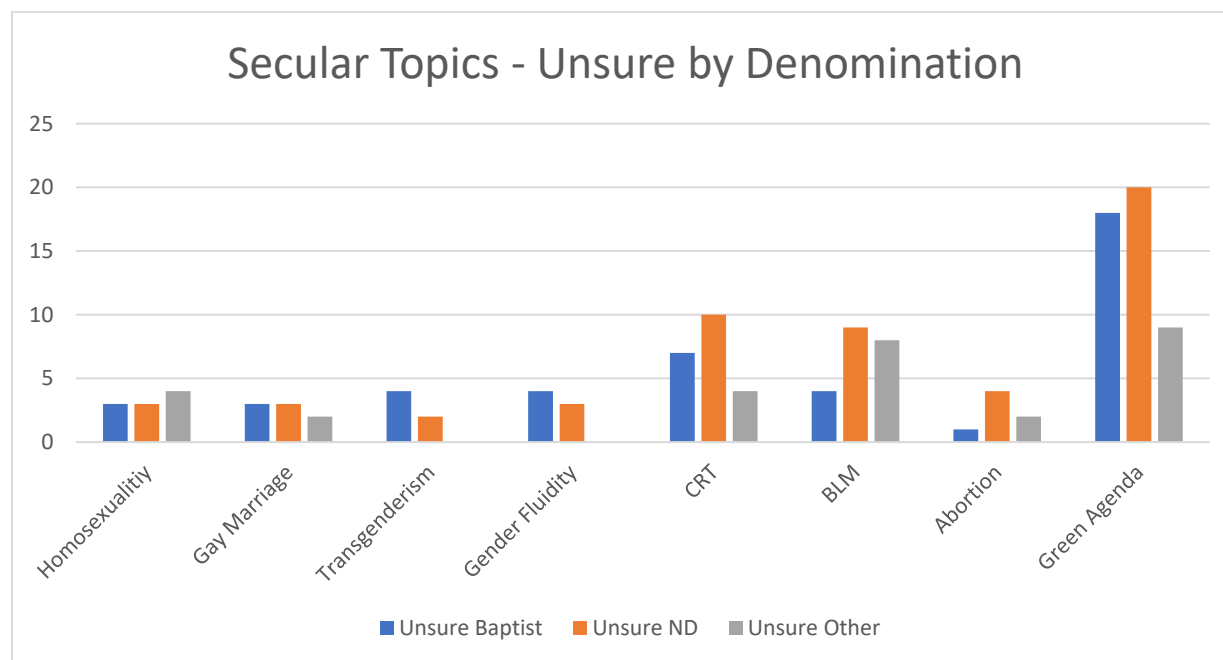
Figure 23. Secular Topics – Unsure by Denomination

Results of a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) offer additional insight into survey responses on secular issues when compared to worship attendance. Participants in the survey were coded as a 1 for attending worship three or more times per month and a 2 for worshipping only two times per month. Results indicate that in every secular topic, there is less deviation in responses within the designated age group for those who attend worship three or more times per month, as shown in table 11.

Table 11. Standard Deviation of Responses on Secular Topics Based on Worship Attendance

<div align="center">Descriptives</div>

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Homosexuality	1	199	1.90	0.397
	2	9	2.22	0.667
	Total	208	1.92	0.415
Gay Marriage	1	199	1.89	0.394
	2	9	2.00	0.707
	Total	208	1.90	0.410
Transgenderism	1	199	1.94	0.321
	2	9	1.89	0.601
	Total	208	1.94	0.336
Gender Fluidity	1	199	1.95	0.322
	2	9	1.89	0.601
	Total	208	1.95	0.337
CRT	1	199	1.97	0.476
	2	9	1.89	0.601
	Total	208	1.97	0.481
BLM	1	199	1.93	0.513
	2	9	1.78	0.667
	Total	208	1.93	0.520
Abortion	1	199	1.95	0.322
	2	9	2.00	0.500
	Total	208	1.96	0.330
Green Environ	1	199	2.00	0.682
	2	9	1.67	0.707
	Total	208	1.99	0.684

Further clarification is provided when viewing the data from the perspective of

denomination alignment in relation to whether students affirmed or disputed the importance of

secular topics. Students are divided into three categories based on their response to church

affiliation. Those who selected Baptist were coded as 1, and those who selected non-denominational were coded as 2. The students who selected other affiliations were coded as 3 and combined to form the third group labeled *Other*, as there were not enough responses from any one denomination to form separate groups.
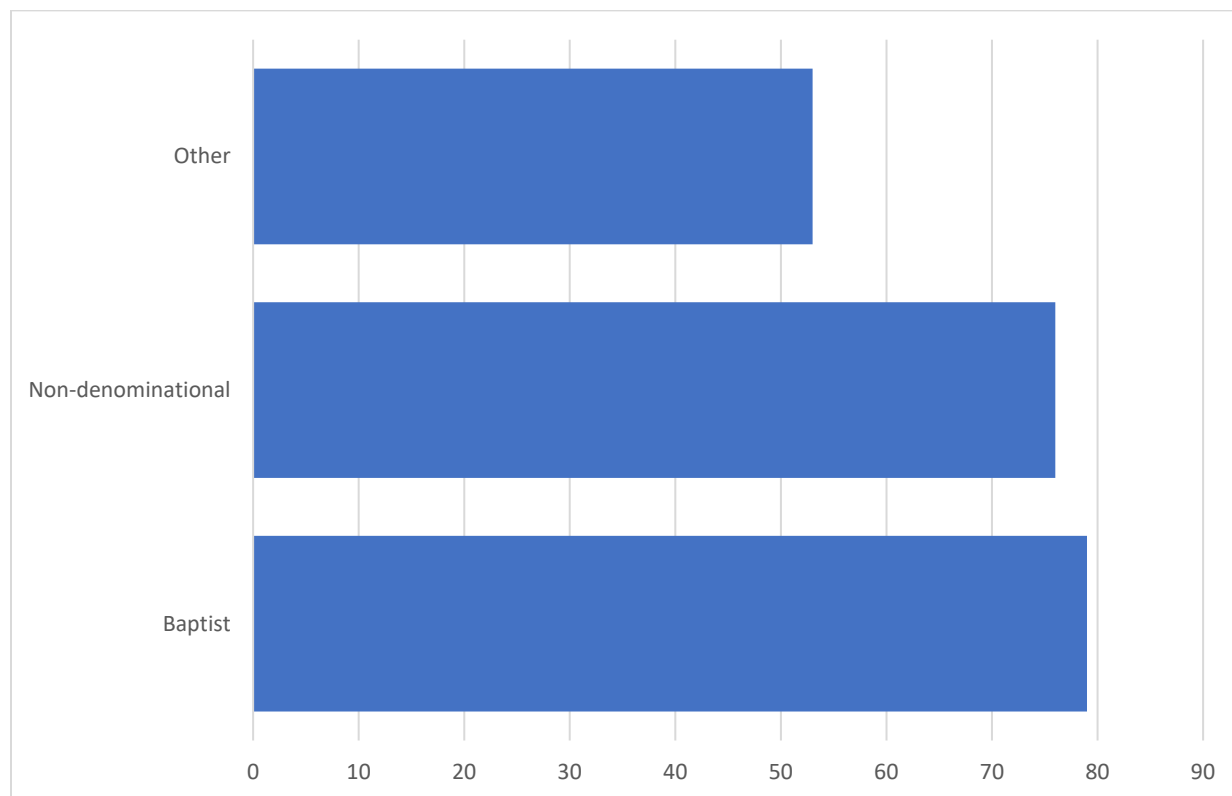
Figure 24. Number of Survey Responses by Denominational Affiliation

Analysis of responses from Baptist students tend to dispute the importance of secular topics most consistently. Students selecting non-denominational or assigned to *Other* as their affiliation while still showing higher responses of dispute also had a larger number of students who either affirmed or were unsure of their stance on secular topics. This data is consistent across all topics except for social justice issues such as BLM, CRT, and Green Agenda, as indicated in figures 25 through 32.
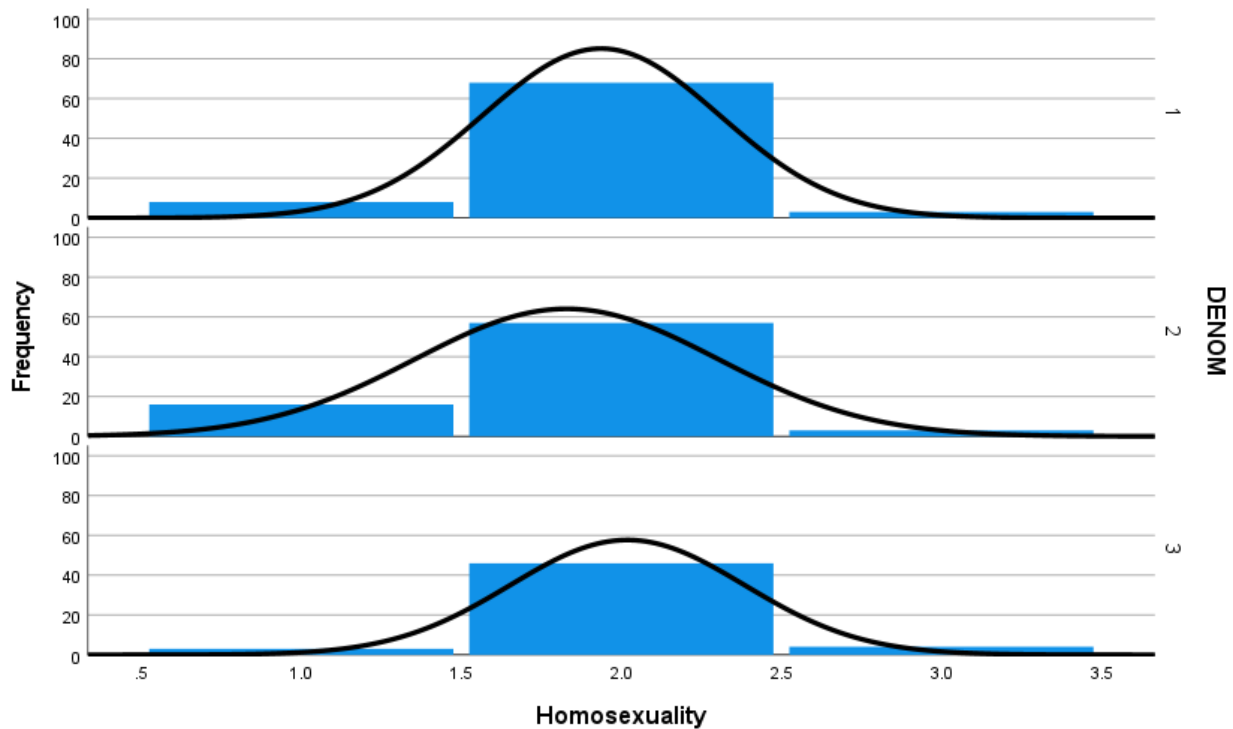
Figure 25. Affirm or Dispute Homosexuality Based on Denominational Affiliation
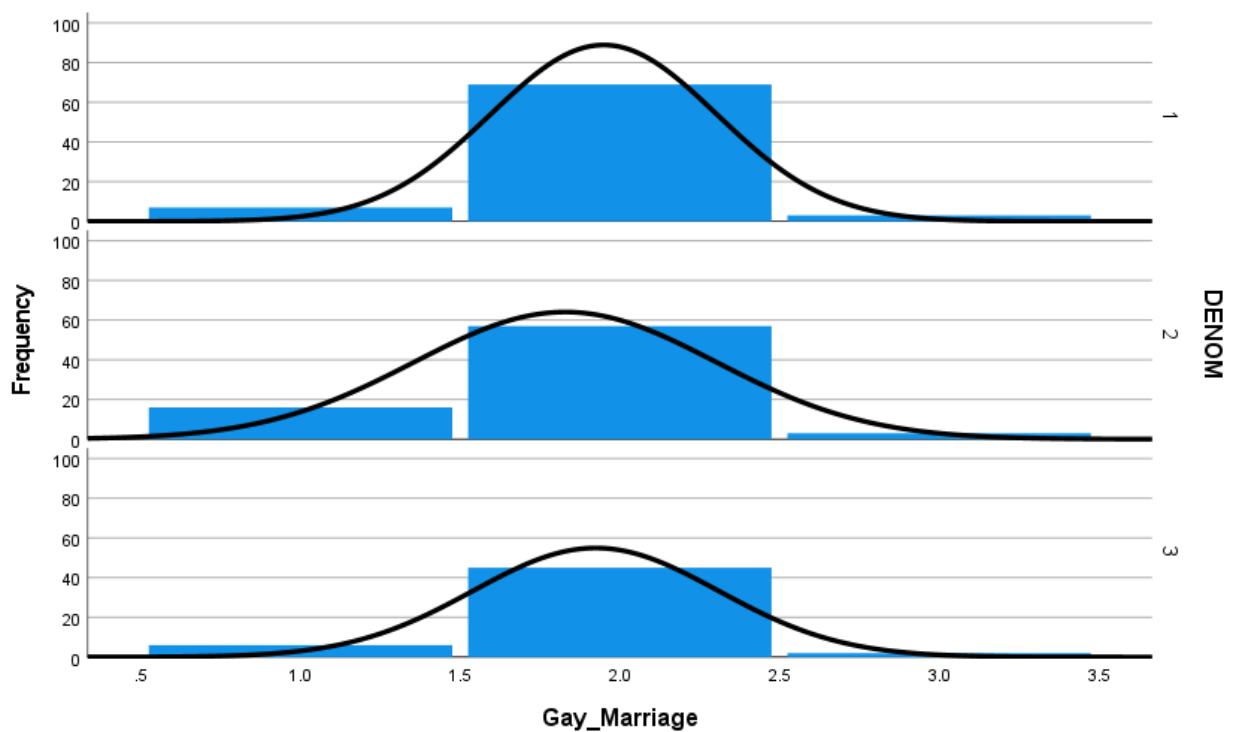
Figure 26. Affirm or Dispute Gay Marriage Based on Denominational Affiliation
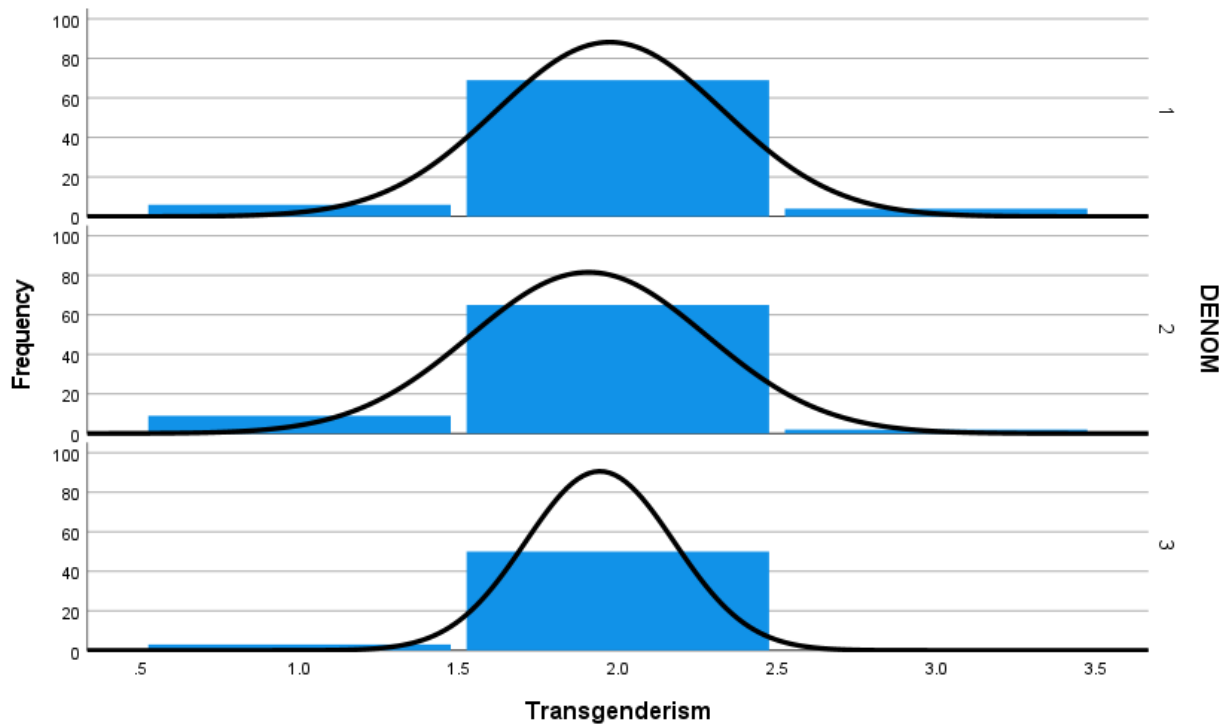
Figure 27. Affirm or Dispute Transgenderism Based on Denominational Affiliation
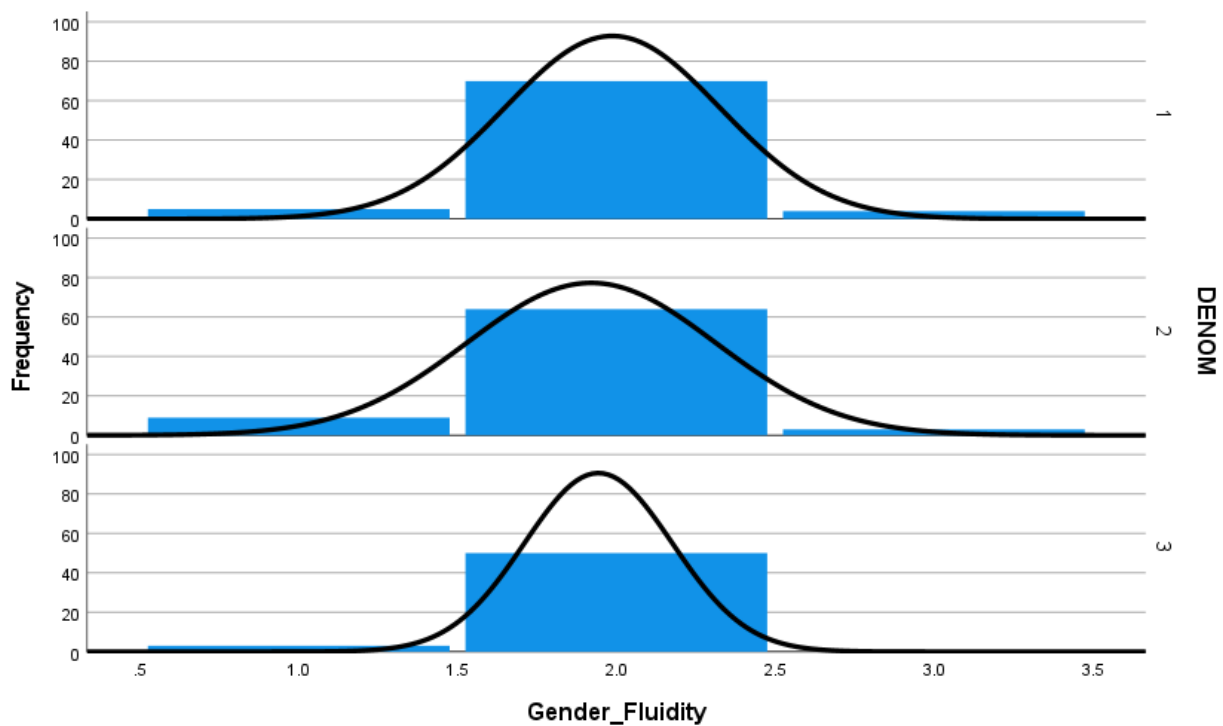
Figure 28. Affirm or Dispute Gender Fluidity Based on Denominational Affiliation
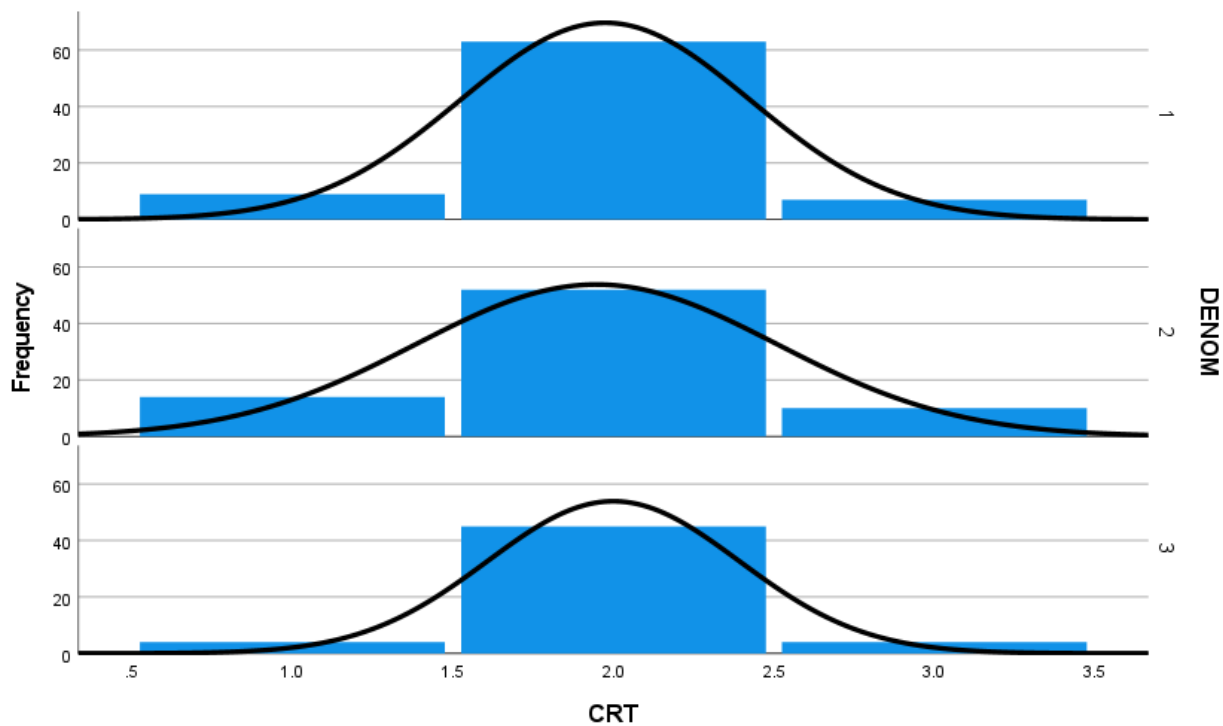
Figure 29. Affirm or Dispute CRT Based on Denominational Affiliation
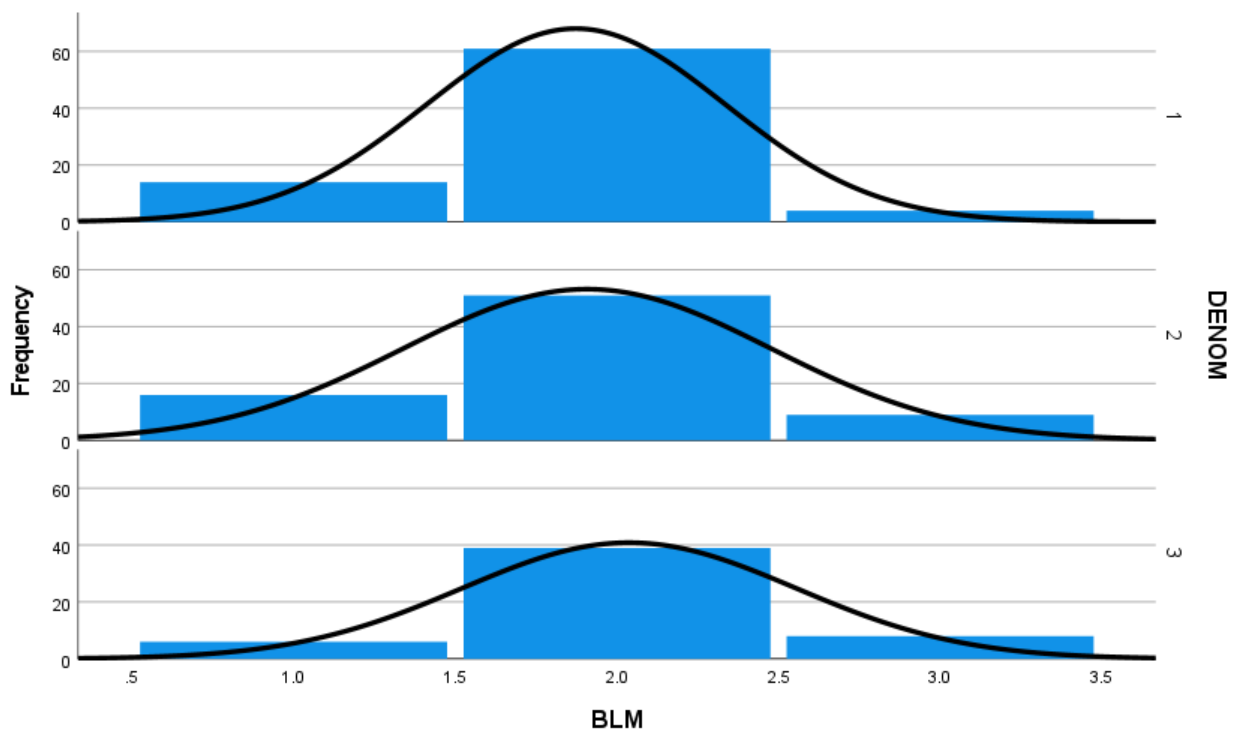
Figure 30. Affirm or Dispute BLM Based on Denominational Affiliation
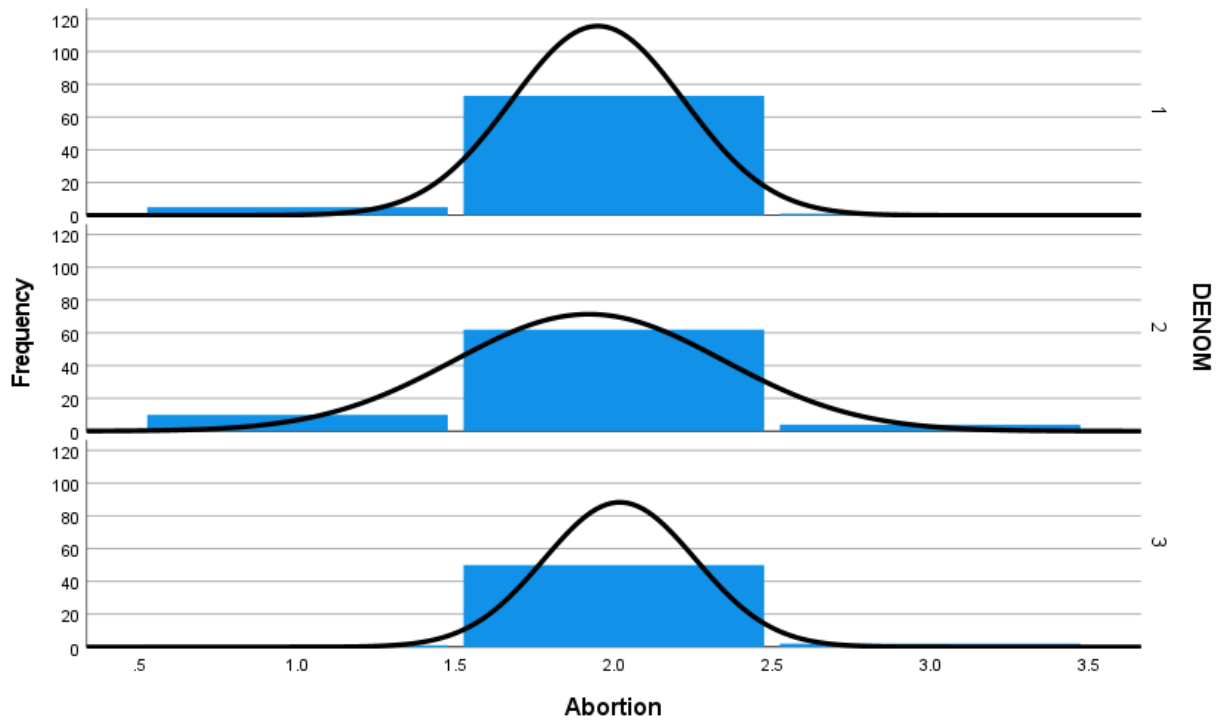
Figure 31. Affirm or Dispute Abortion Based on Denominational Affiliation
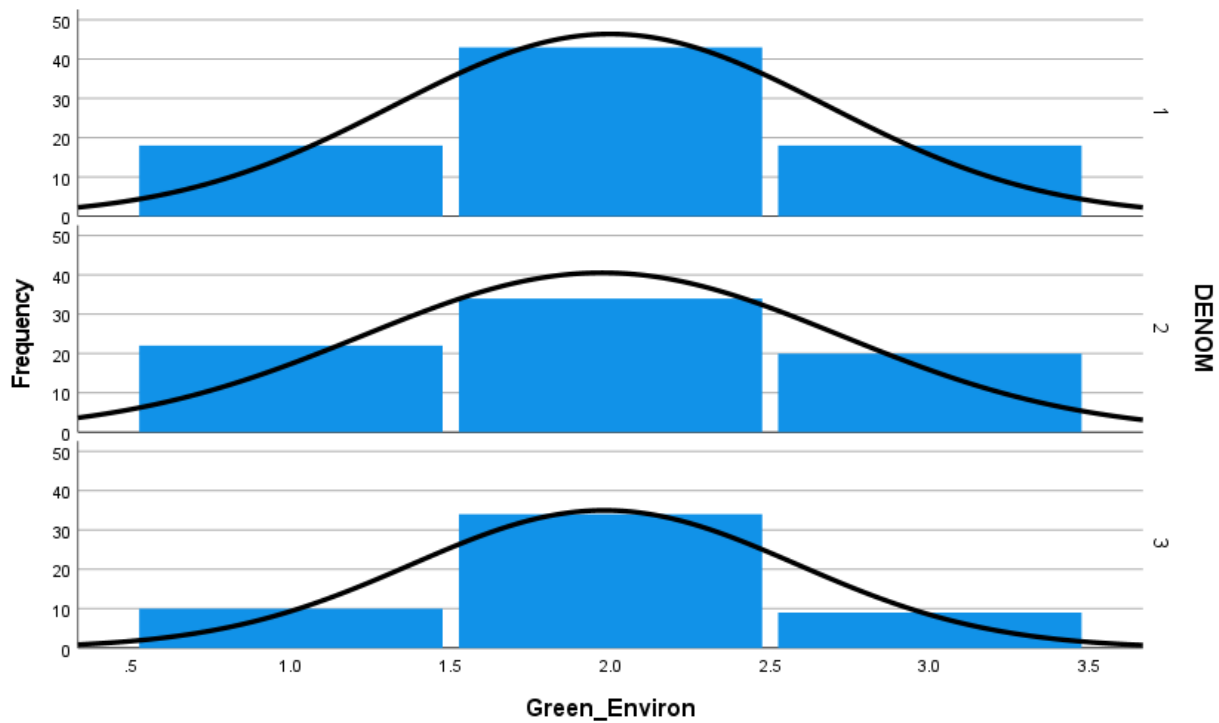
Figure 32. Affirm or Dispute Green Agenda Based on Denominational Affiliation

In the survey, students were asked to identify the message topics that were presented throughout the year by their pastors and youth pastors as part of worship or youth gatherings. The number of mentions for each topic was tabulated and listed in table 12. Based on the responses to the topics presented in the study, BLM and Green Environment are the most discussed by each church leader.

Table 12. Message Topic Tabulation by Pastor and Youth Pastor

Message Topics	Pastor Mentions	Youth Pastor Mentions
Homosexuality	2	2
Gay Marriage	3	2
Transgenderism	2	1
Gender Fluidity	2	1
Critical Race Theory	6	3
Black Lives Matter	**12**	**7**
Abortion Rights	6	2
Environmental Issues	**13**	**8**

To gain greater insight into the impact of pastoral and youth pastor messaging on secular topics, data were analyzed using a one-way ANOVA. Interestingly, the results of the impact of pastoral preaching on the message topics show significance across all topics except for homosexuality, while there is no significance noted in messages delivered by youth pastors. The results of these analyses are shown in tables 13 and 14.

Table 13. Significance of Pastoral Messaging by Secular Topic

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Homosexuality	Between Groups	6.334	14	.452	1.581	.119
	Within Groups	14.026	49	.286		
	Total	20.359	63			
Gay_Marriage	Between Groups	7.241	14	.517	2.254	.018
	Within Groups	11.244	49	.229		
	Total	18.484	63			
Transgenderism	Between Groups	6.199	14	.443	3.140	.002
	Within Groups	6.910	49	.141		
	Total	13.109	63			
Gender_Fluidity	Between Groups	5.423	14	.387	1.982	.040
	Within Groups	9.577	49	.195		
	Total	15.000	63			
CRT	Between Groups	10.276	14	.734	2.324	.015
	Within Groups	15.474	49	.316		
	Total	25.750	63			
BLM	Between Groups	8.391	14	.599	1.912	.048
	Within Groups	15.359	49	.313		
	Total	23.750	63			
Abortion	Between Groups	6.410	14	.458	3.405	<.001
	Within Groups	6.590	49	.134		
	Total	13.000	63			
Green_Environ	Between Groups	11.181	14	.799	1.799	.066
	Within Groups	21.756	49	.444		
	Total	32.937	63			

Table 14. Significance of Youth Pastor Messaging by Secular Topic

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Homosexuality	Between Groups	1.135	9	.126	.551	.828
	Within Groups	9.375	41	.229		
	Total	10.510	50			
Gay_Marriage	Between Groups	.637	9	.071	.428	.912
	Within Groups	6.775	41	.165		
	Total	7.412	50			
Transgenderism	Between Groups	.645	9	.072	.482	.878
	Within Groups	6.100	41	.149		
	Total	6.745	50			
Gender_Fluidity	Between Groups	.694	9	.077	.479	.880
	Within Groups	6.600	41	.161		
	Total	7.294	50			
CRT	Between Groups	.735	9	.082	.243	.986
	Within Groups	13.775	41	.336		
	Total	14.510	50			
BLM	Between Groups	.627	9	.070	.204	.992
	Within Groups	14.000	41	.341		
	Total	14.627	50			
Abortion	Between Groups	.410	9	.046	.306	.969
	Within Groups	6.100	41	.149		
	Total	6.510	50			
Green_Environ	Between Groups	5.152	9	.572	1.742	.110
	Within Groups	13.475	41	.329		
	Total	18.627	50			

Further analysis was conducted to provide clarity on whether the age of the participants impacted the students' responses to either affirm or dispute prominent secular issues. Student age was coded from 1 to 8, with 1 representing students at the youngest end of the spectrum (18) and 8 identifying students at the oldest age on the spectrum (25). While there is some variance within the topics, the results of the analysis signaled that in each category, the standard deviation of responses tended to increase with age, except for the category of green environment, in which

the standard deviation was high across all age categories. The results of this analysis are shown
in table 15.

Table 15. Standard Deviation of Responses on Secular Topics Based on Age

Descriptives

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Homosexuality	1	29	2.03	0.325
	2	47	1.89	0.312
	3	39	1.97	0.280
	4	39	1.82	0.451
	5	19	1.95	0.524
	6	22	1.86	0.560
	7	7	1.86	0.690
	8	6	2.00	0.632
	Total	208	1.92	0.415
Gay Marriage	1	29	2.03	0.325
	2	47	1.89	0.375
	3	39	1.95	0.223
	4	39	1.82	0.451
	5	19	1.84	0.501
	6	22	1.91	0.526
	7	7	1.57	0.535
	8	6	2.00	0.632
	Total	208	1.90	0.410
Transgenderism	1	29	1.97	0.186
	2	47	1.98	0.329
	3	39	1.95	0.223
	4	39	1.87	0.409
	5	19	2.00	0.333
	6	22	1.95	0.375
	7	7	1.71	0.488
	8	6	2.00	0.632
	Total	208	1.94	0.336
Gender Fluidity	1	29	1.97	0.186
	2	47	2.00	0.295
	3	39	1.95	0.223
	4	39	1.87	0.409
	5	19	2.05	0.405

	6	22	1.95	0.375
	7	7	1.71	0.488
	8	6	2.00	0.632
	Total	208	1.95	0.337
CRT	1	29	1.97	0.325
	2	47	2.00	0.466
	3	39	2.13	0.409
	4	39	1.85	0.540
	5	19	1.89	0.459
	6	22	2.00	0.617
	7	7	1.71	0.488
	8	6	2.00	0.632
	Total	208	1.97	0.481
BLM	1	29	1.93	0.371
	2	47	1.87	0.494
	3	39	2.13	0.409
	4	39	1.79	0.615
	5	19	1.84	0.501
	6	22	2.09	0.610
	7	7	1.71	0.488
	8	6	1.83	0.753
	Total	208	1.93	0.520
Abortion	1	29	1.97	0.186
	2	47	1.98	0.254
	3	39	2.00	0.229
	4	39	1.85	0.432
	5	19	2.11	0.315
	6	22	2.00	0.436
	7	7	1.71	0.488
	8	6	1.83	0.408
	Total	208	1.96	0.330
Green Environ	**1**	**29**	**2.00**	**0.655**
	2	**47**	**1.96**	**0.588**
	3	**39**	**1.95**	**0.724**
	4	**39**	**1.92**	**0.703**
	5	**19**	**2.16**	**0.765**
	6	**22**	**2.27**	**0.703**
	7	**7**	**1.71**	**0.756**
	8	**6**	**1.50**	**0.548**
	Total	**208**	**1.99**	**0.684**

Overall, the analysis of the secular topics addressed in the survey shows a strong indication that while students maintain a firm stance on the topics of homosexuality, gay marriage, transgenderism, gender fluidity, critical race theory, and abortion, they are less stable in their views on BLM and environmental issues.

Participants in the study were asked to identify which three secular topics were the most important to them. These topics have been divided by age to provide insight into patterns of secular topics by age groupings. The *Most Important*, *Second Most Important*, and *Third Most Important* secular topics are sorted by age and provided in figures 33 through 64. The focus of these figures is to show commonly selected topics, not whether the participant affirmed or disputed the topic, as this information was shared earlier in the chapter. A brief summary of the choices made is provided following each age group.

Figure 33. Most Important Secular Topic – 18-year-olds

Figure 34. Second Most Important Secular Topic – 18-year-olds

Figure 35. Third Most Important Secular Topic – 18-year-olds

Figure 36. Most Important Secular Topic Combined – 18-year-olds

For 18-year-old participants, the *First* and *Second Most Important* secular topic is abortion rights, while CRT is the *Third Most Important* topic. When combining the choices in all three categories, abortion rights remain the most often-selected option, while homosexuality and CRT also received a significant number of votes.
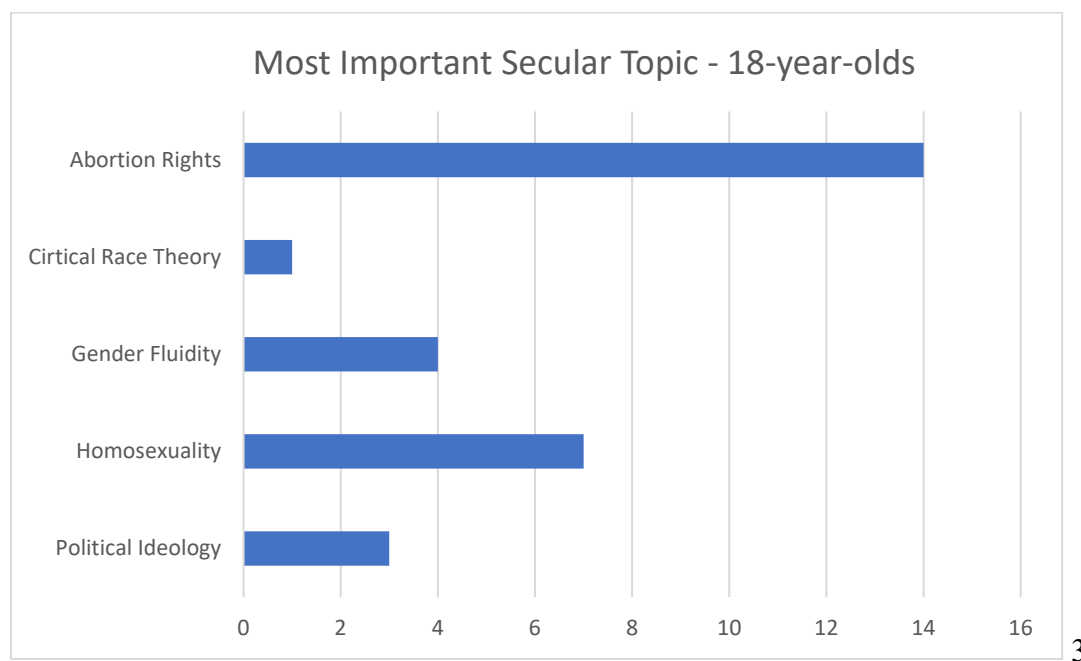
Figure 37. Most Important Secular Topic – 19-year-olds

Figure 38. Second Most Important Secular Topic – 19-year-olds

Figure 39. Third Most Important Secular Topic – 19-year-olds

Figure 40. Most Important Secular Topic Combined – 19-year-olds

For 19-year-old participants, the *Most Important* topic is also abortion; however, a review of the *Second Most Important* topic shows a three-way tie between CRT, homosexuality, transgenderism. CRT is also the most selected option for the *Third Most Important* topic. Similar to the 18-year-old group, when all three categories are combined, abortion rights remain the most often-selected option, while homosexuality and CRT also received a significant number of votes.

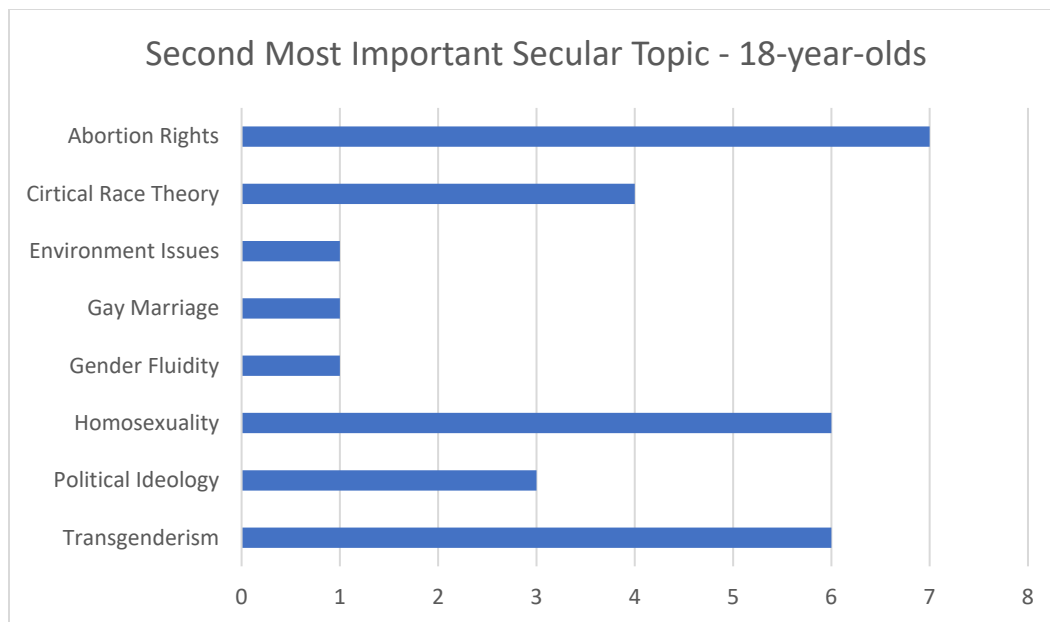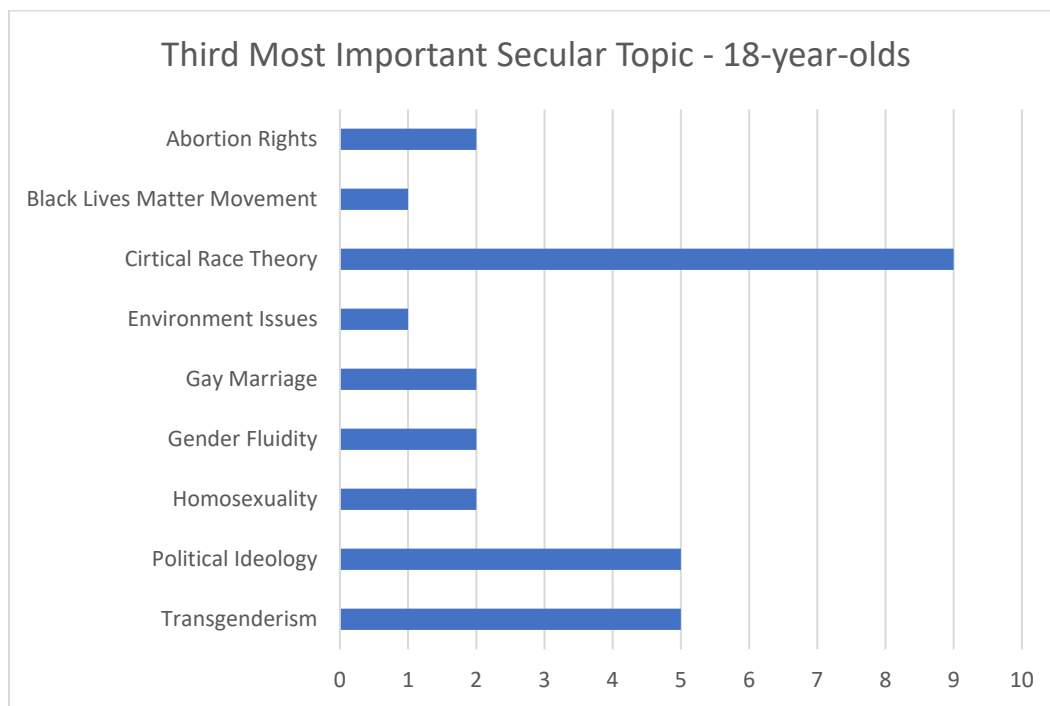**Figure 41. Most Important Secular Topic – 20-year-olds**

Figure 42. Second Most Important Secular Topic – 20-year-olds
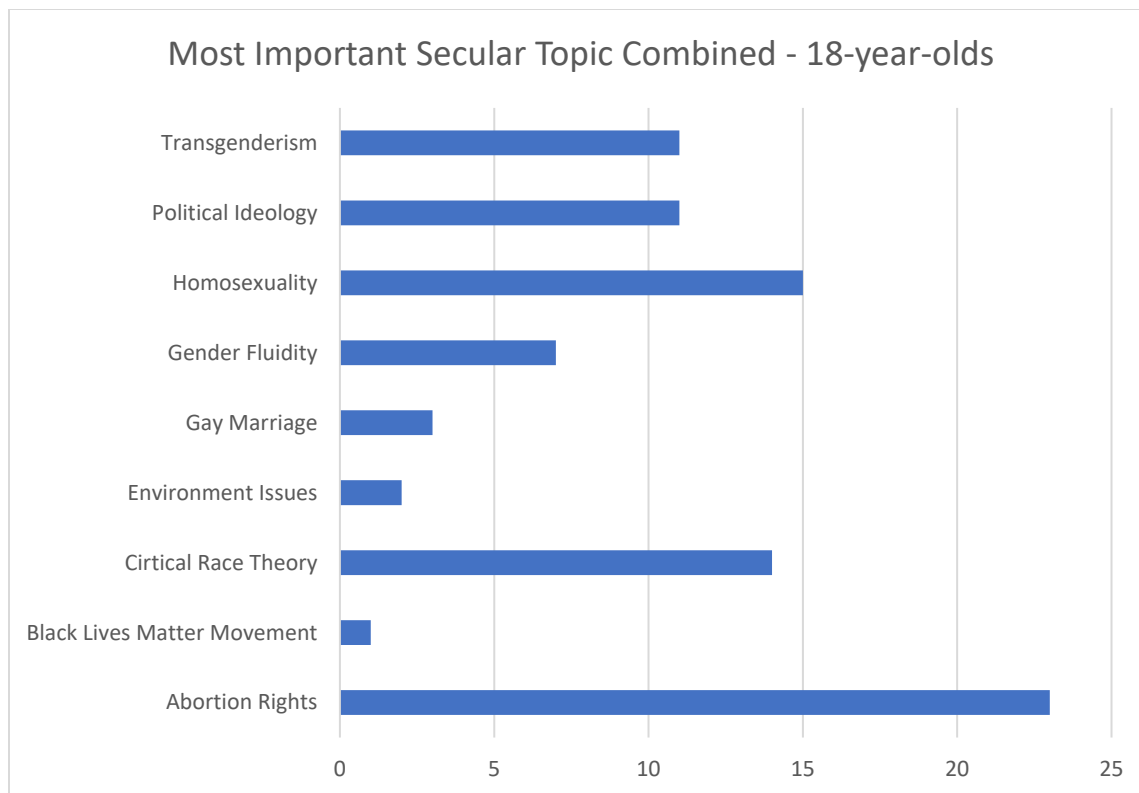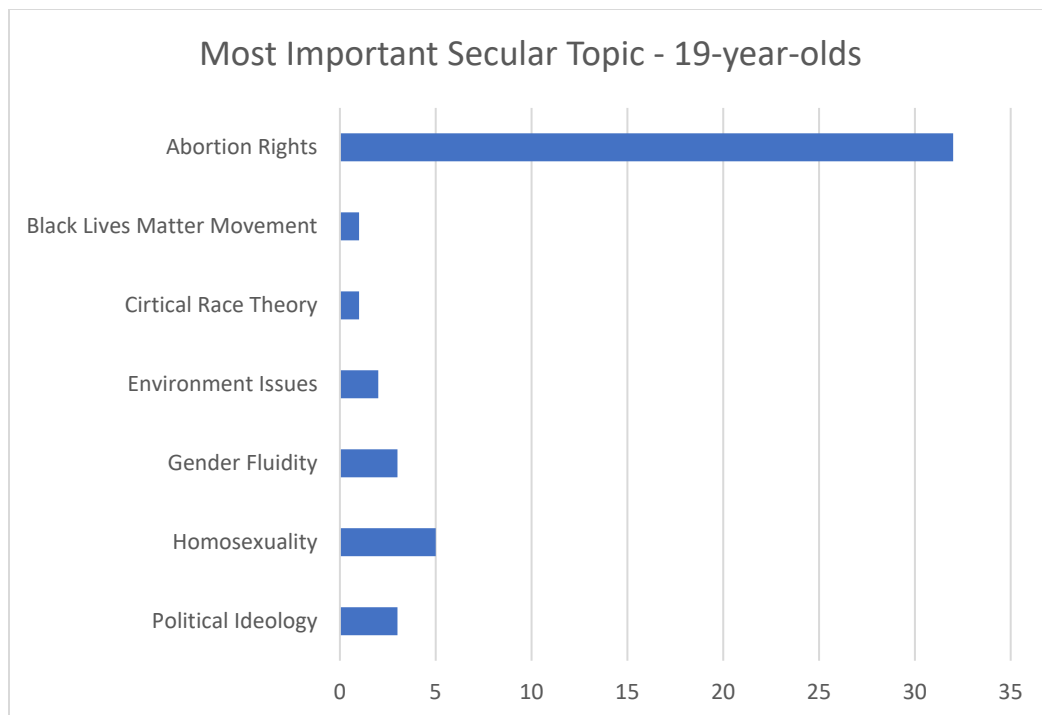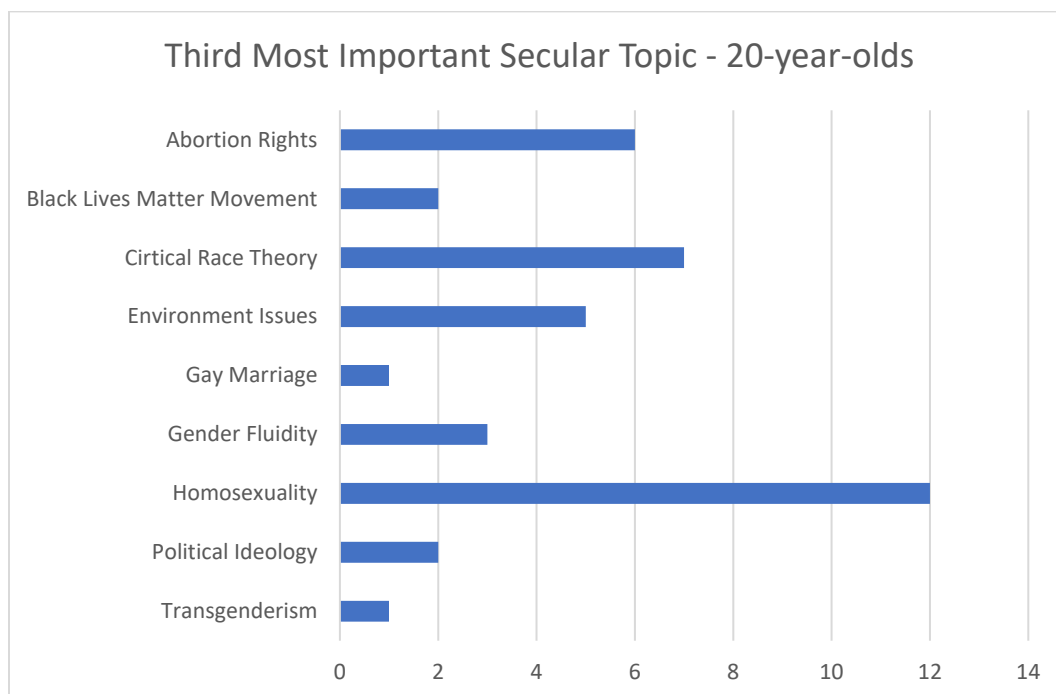

Figure 43. Third Most Important Secular Topic – 20-year-olds

Figure 44. Most Important Secular Topic Combined – 20-year-olds

For the 20-year-old age group, abortion remains as the top choice for the *Most Important* issue, with transgenderism receiving the highest number of votes for the *Second Most Important* topic. BLM and CRT also exhibit a strong showing in the *Second Most Important* category, while homosexuality received the top number of votes for *Third Most Important*. Abortion rights maintained the top number of votes when all responses were tallied, with homosexuality in second and a similar number of selections for homosexuality, CRT, transgenderism, and homosexuality. Results in the 20-year-old age group exhibit a more evenly split number of responses when compared to the combined tallies for the two younger age groups.
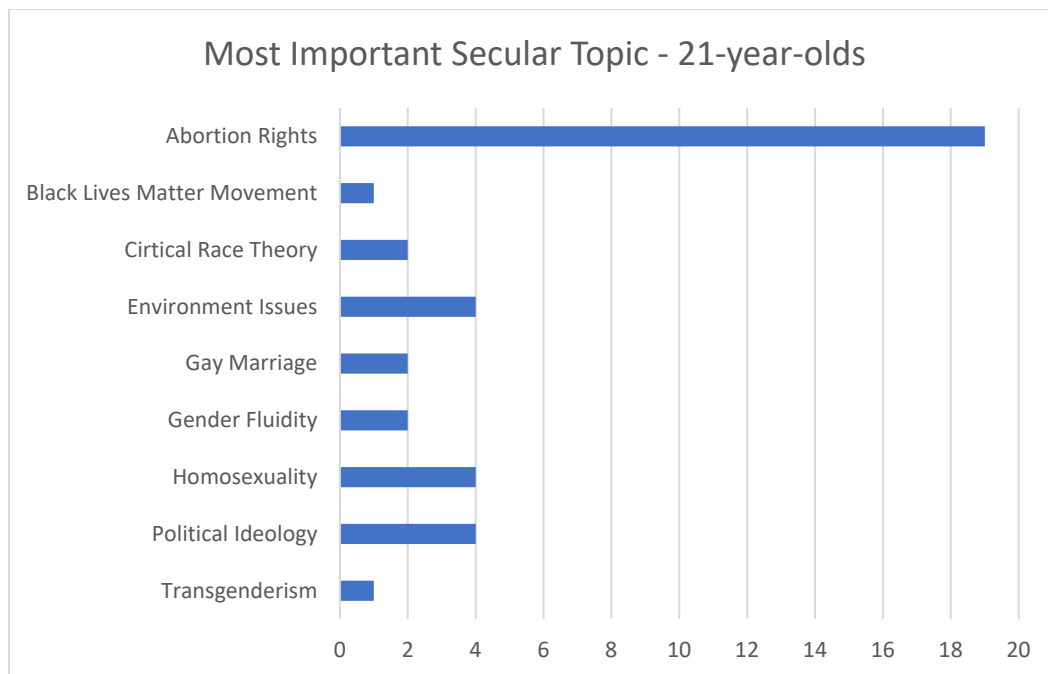
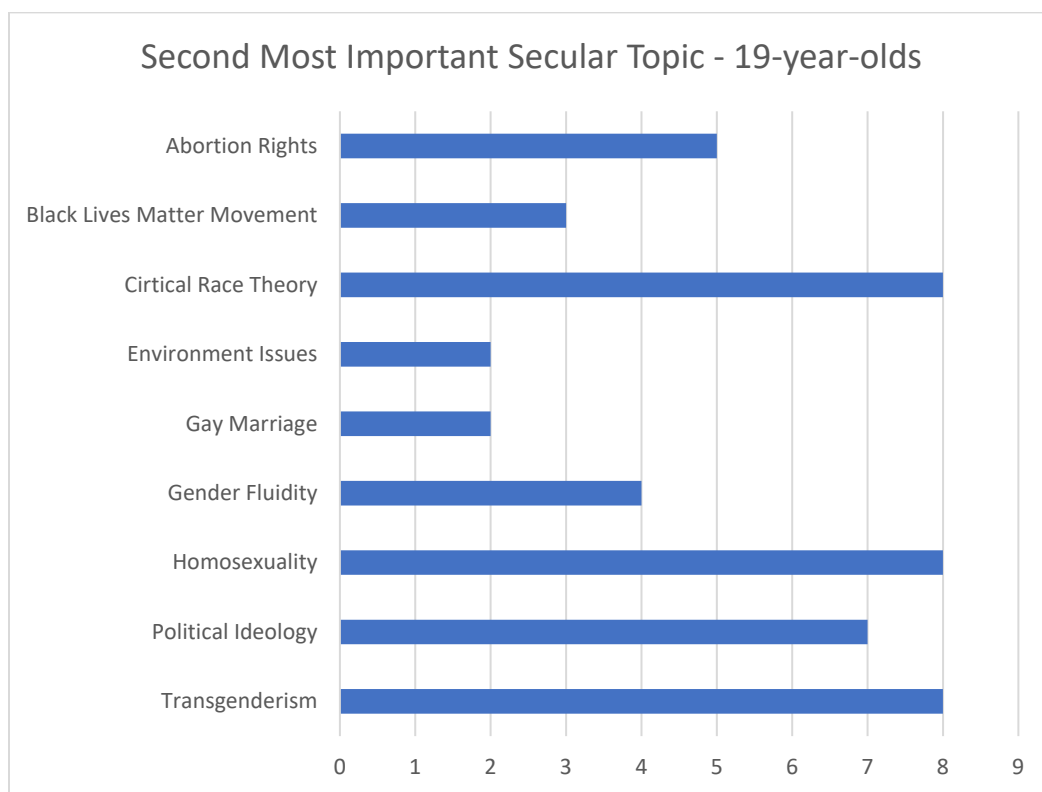**Figure 45. Most Important Secular Topic – 21-year-olds**
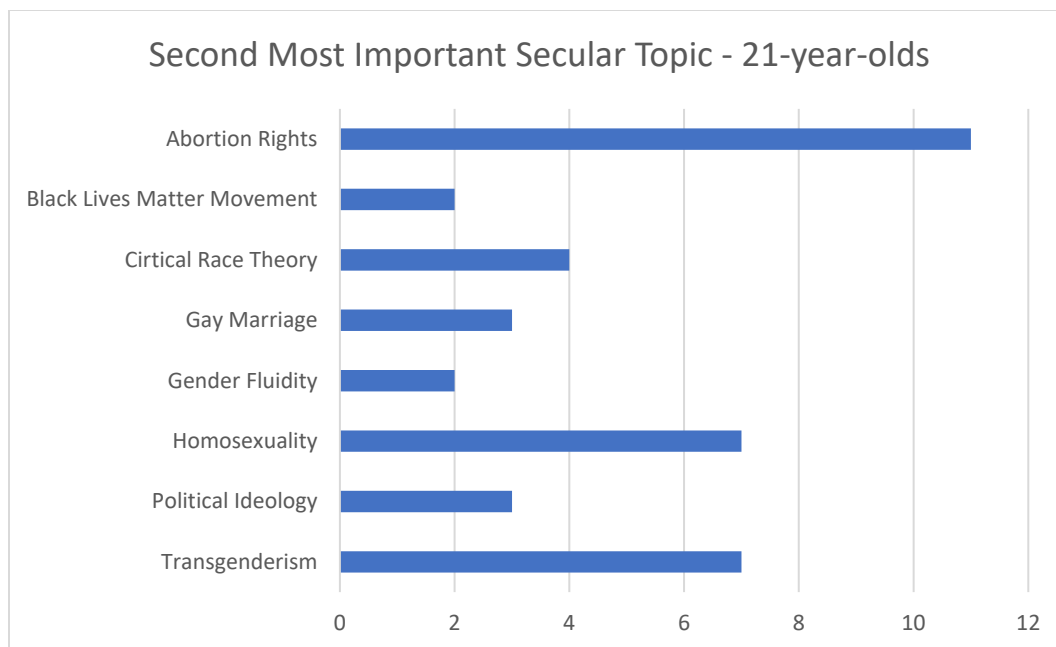
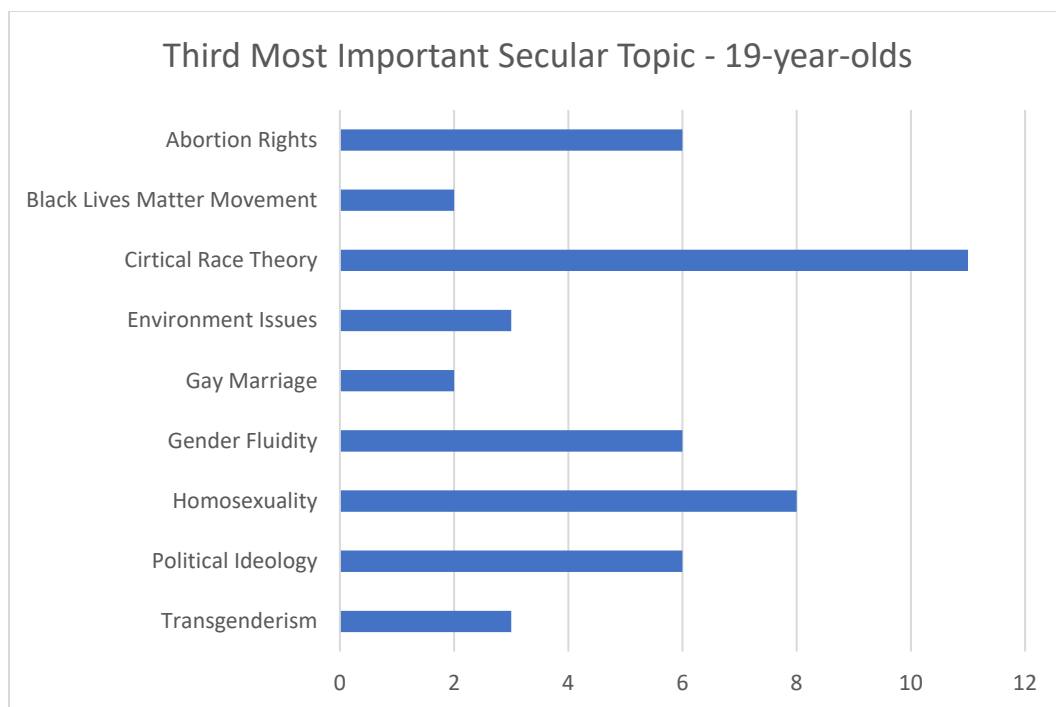**Figure 46. Second Most Important Secular Topic – 21-year-olds**
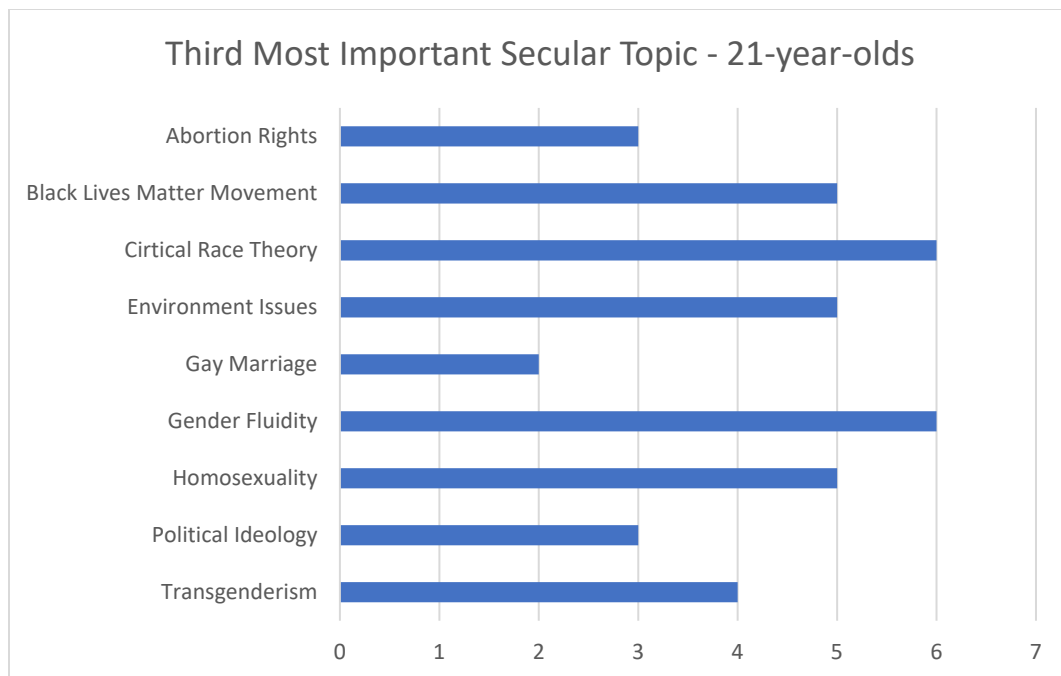
Figure 47. Third Most Important Secular Topic – 21-year-olds
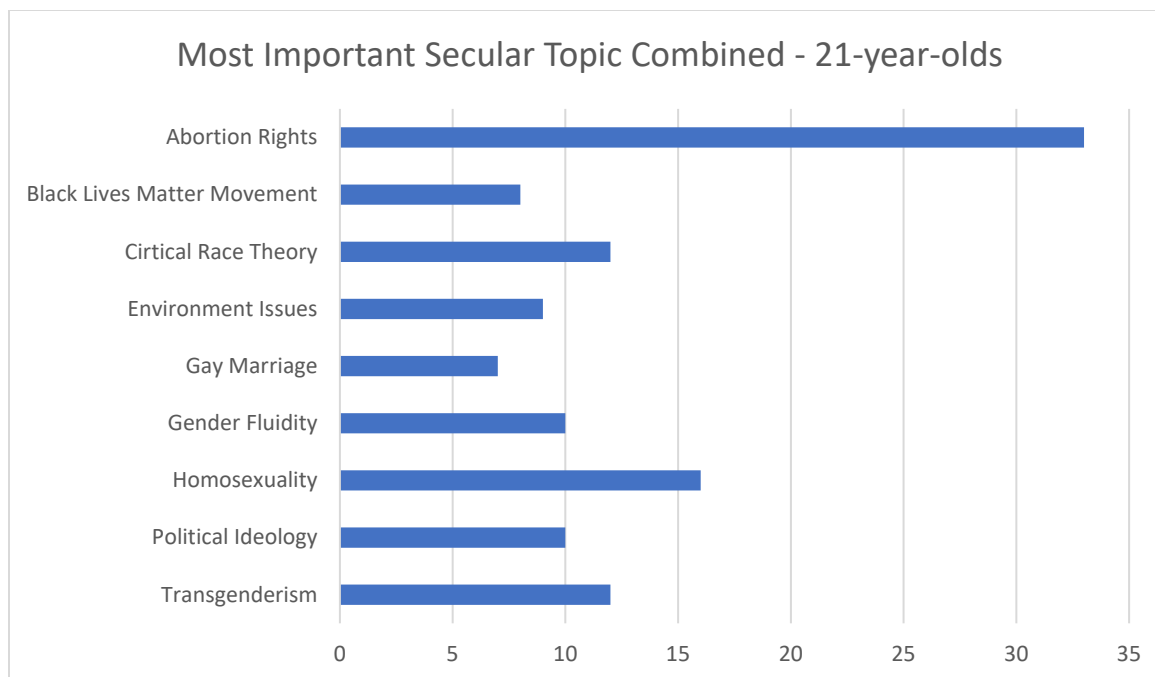
Figure 48. Most Important Secular Topic Combined – 21-year-olds

For the first time, the choice of abortion remains the top secular issue in both the *First*

and *Second Most Important* topic selection. Homosexuality and transgenderism also received a

significant number of responses in the *Second Most Important* category. Overall, the *Third Most*

Important selections were fairly evenly distributed; however, abortion was clearly chosen most

often when all three groups were combined.
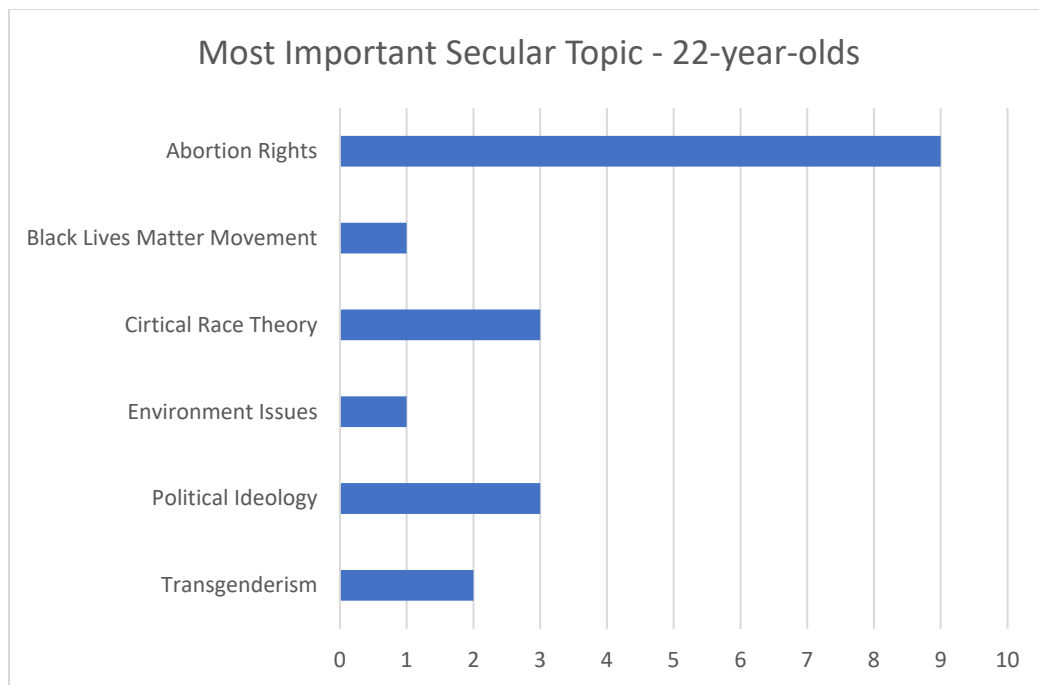
Figure 49. Most Important Secular Topic – 22-year-olds
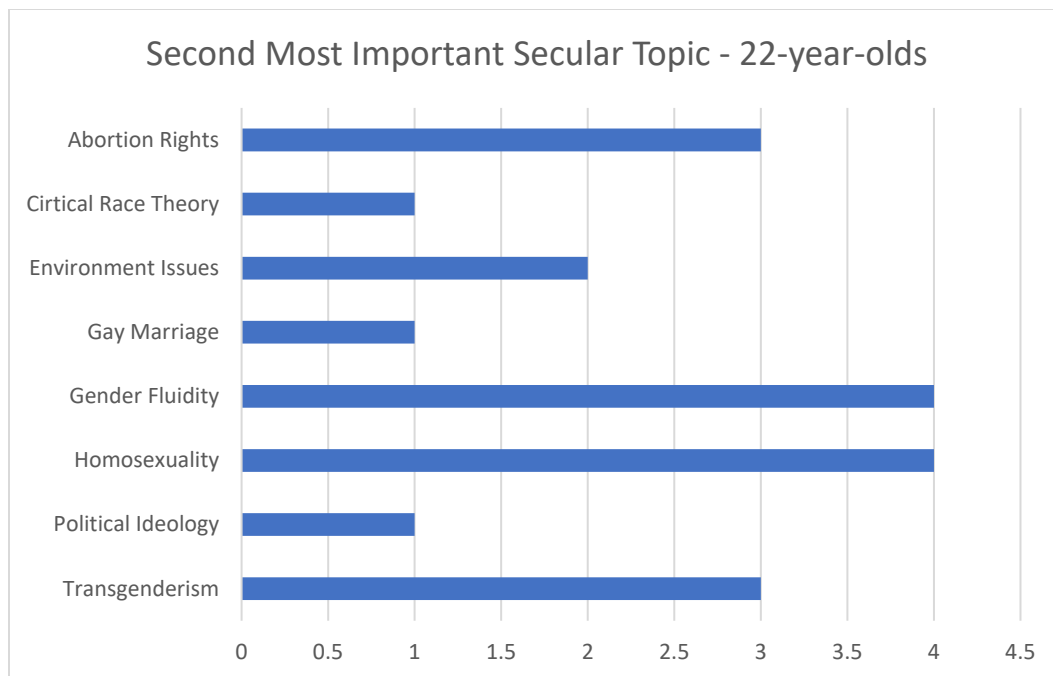
Figure 50. Second Most Important Secular Topic – 22-year-olds
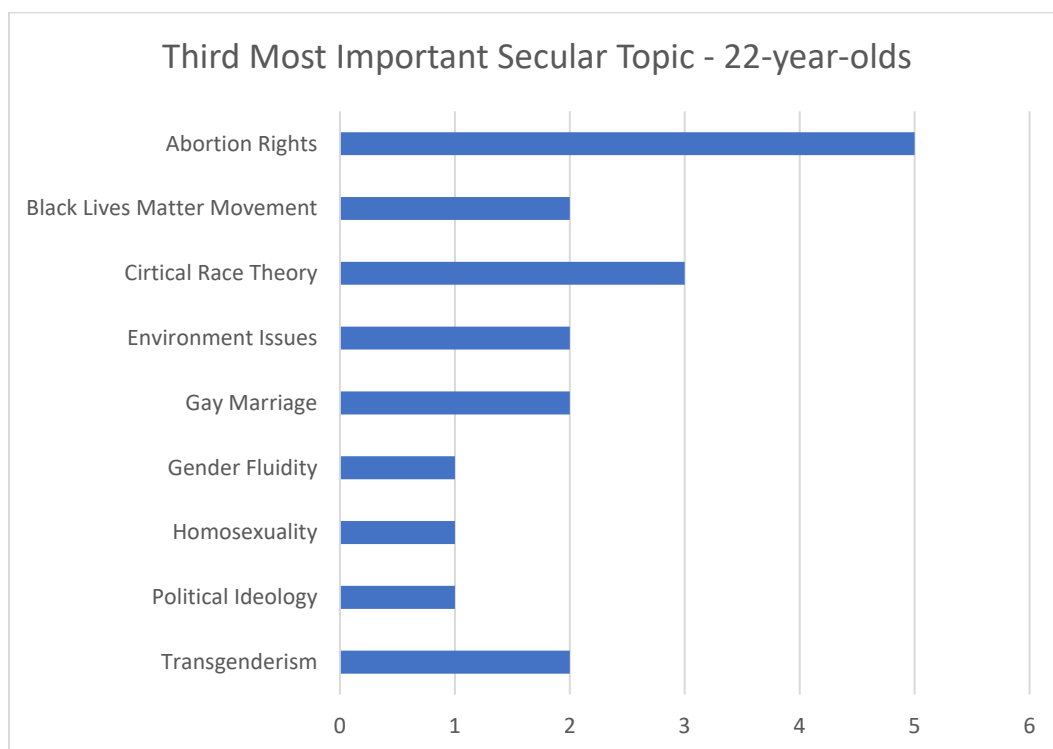
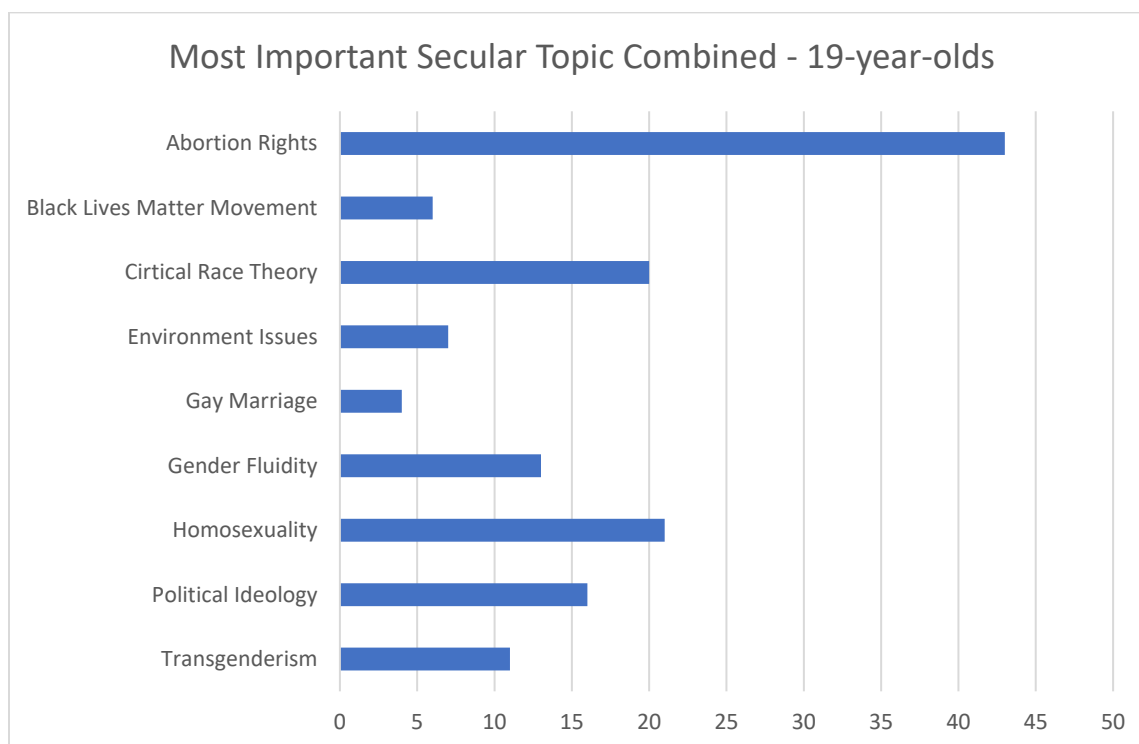
Figure 51. Third Most Important Secular Topic – 22-year-olds
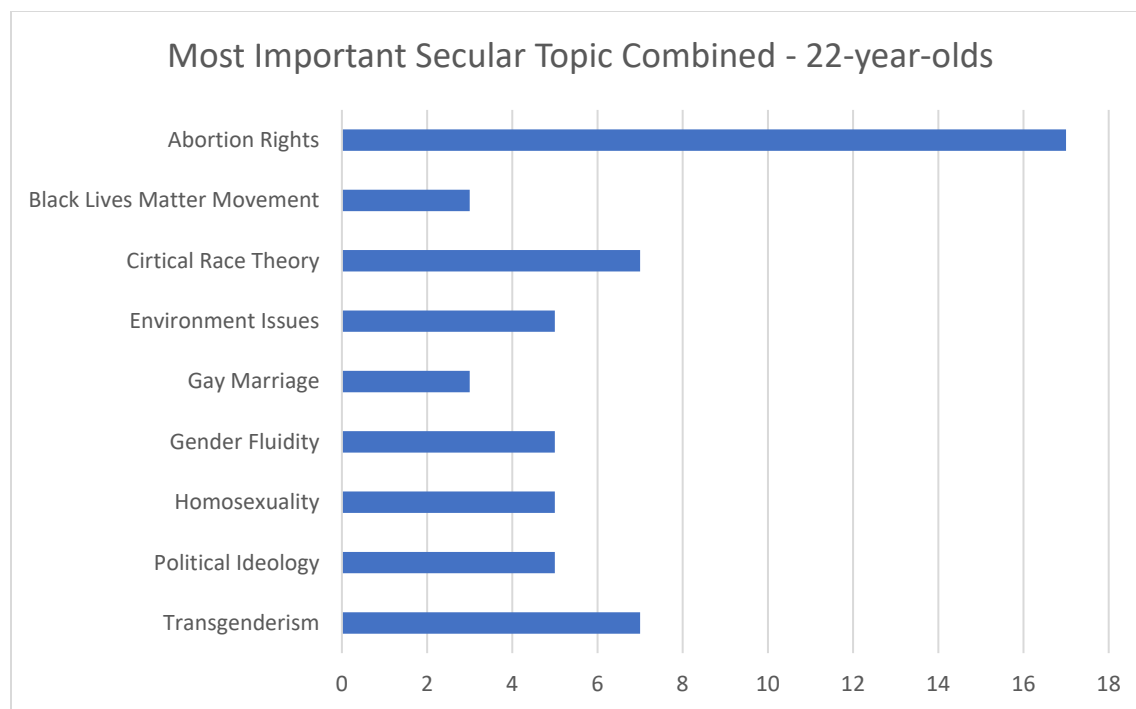
Figure 52. Most Important Secular Topic Combined – 22-year-olds

As with the previously reported statistics, abortion was the top selection for *Most Important* secular issue. A review of the *Second Most Important* topics shows that the alternative lifestyle issues of homosexuality and gender fluidity received a number of votes, while transgenderism and abortion were also frequently selected. Abortion rights return as the top earner in tallies for the third round of votes, as well as in the combined count. Similar to the 21-year-olds, selections of the remaining secular topics were fairly evenly distributed.
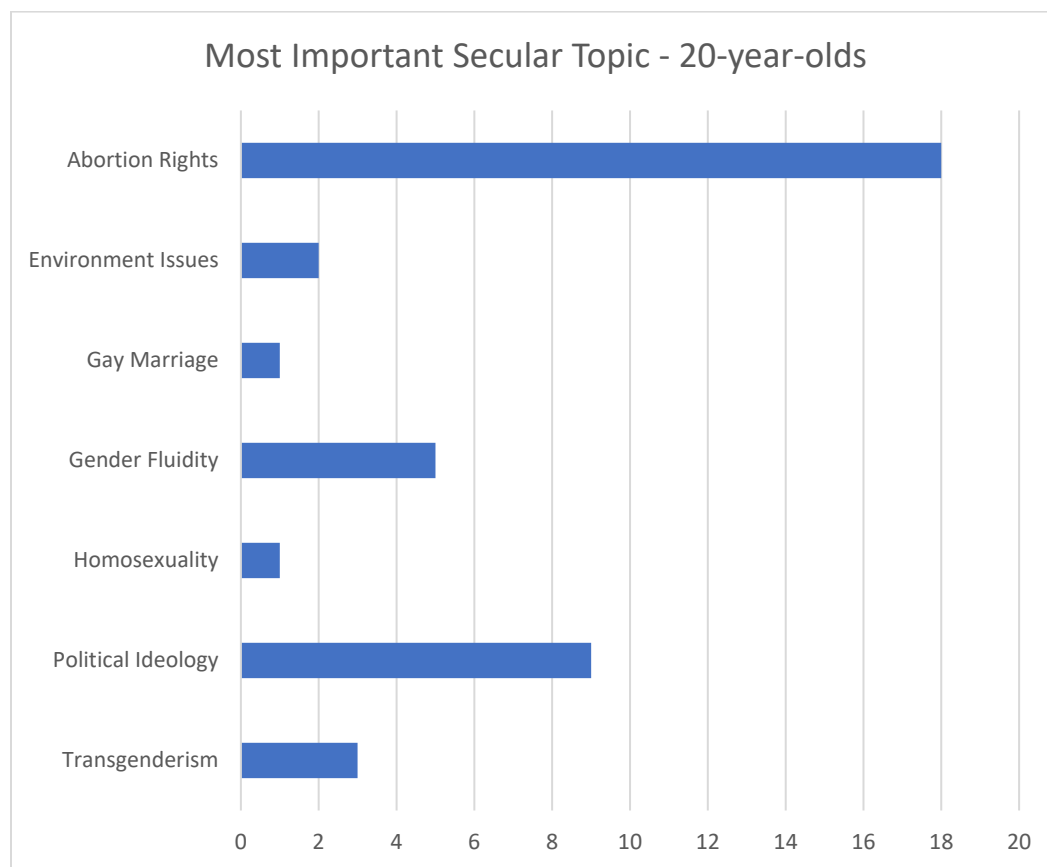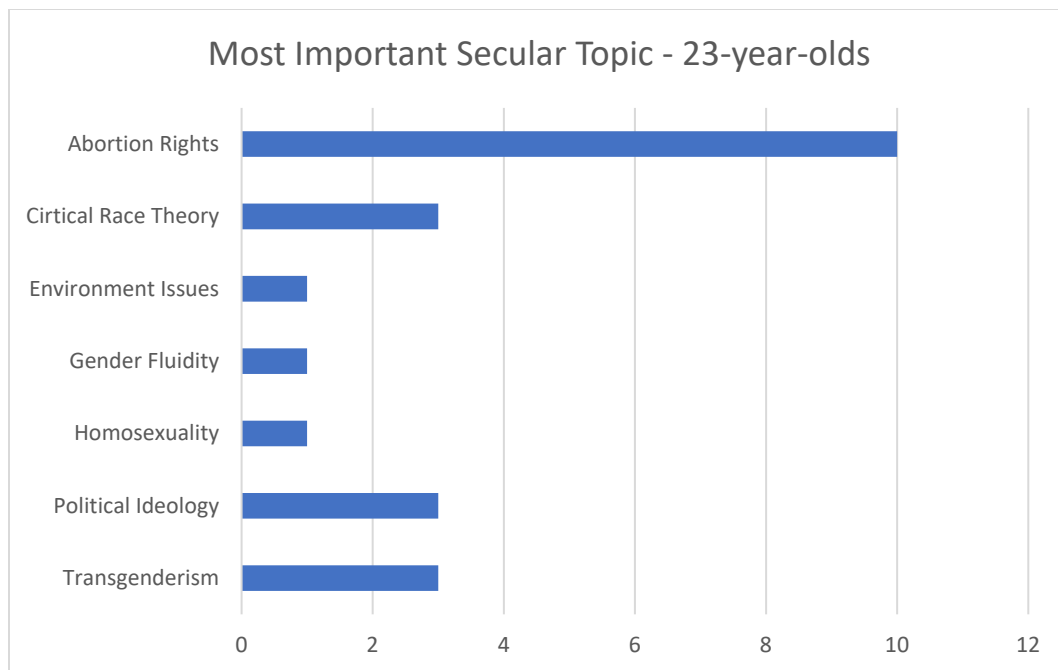
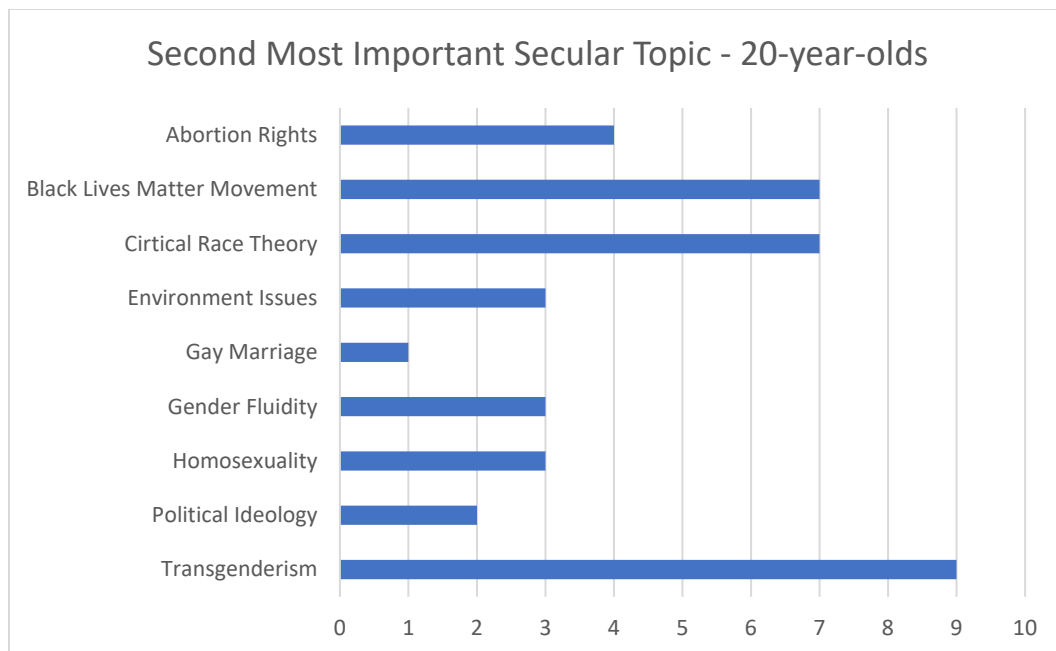**Figure 53. Most Important Secular Topic – 23-year-olds**
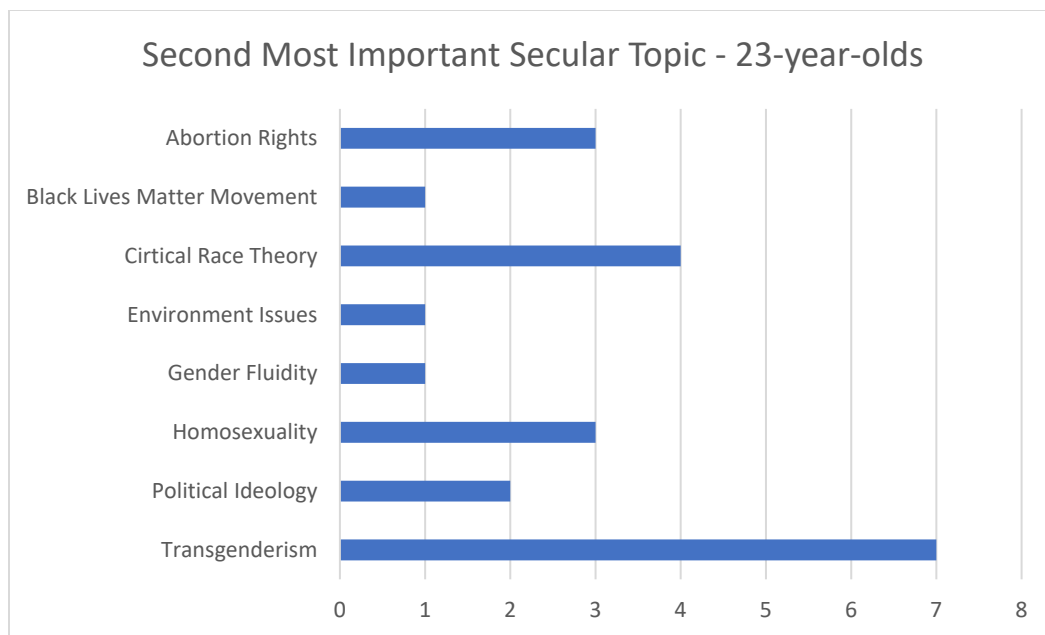
Figure 54. Second Most Important Secular Topic – 23-year-olds

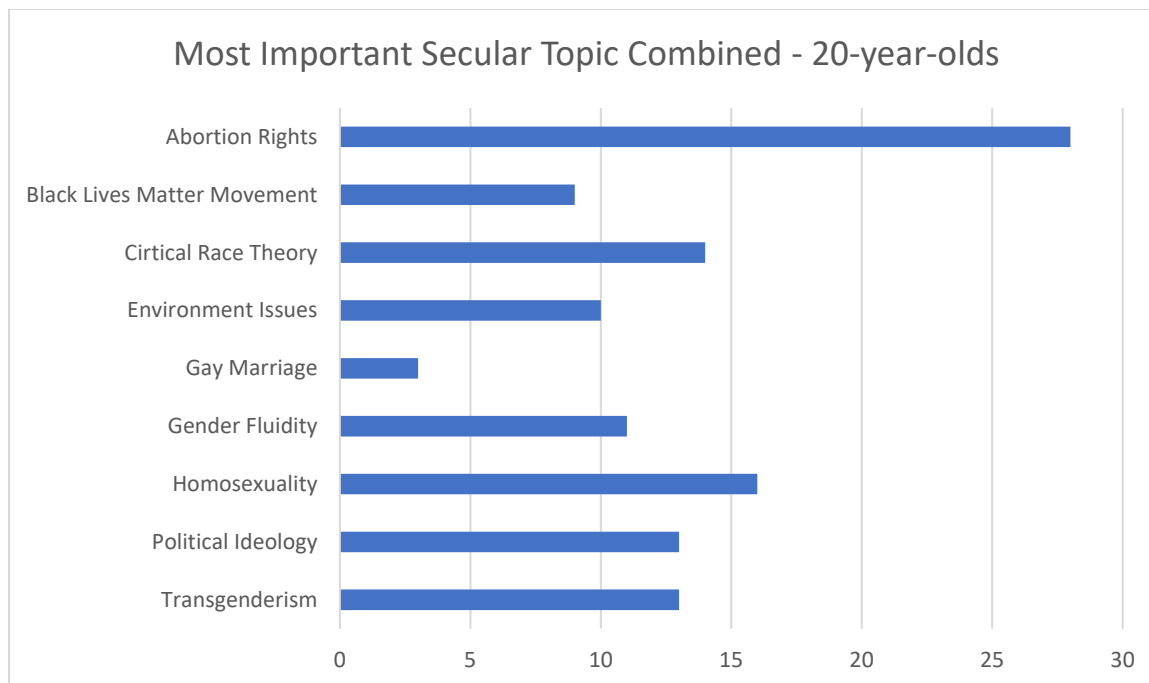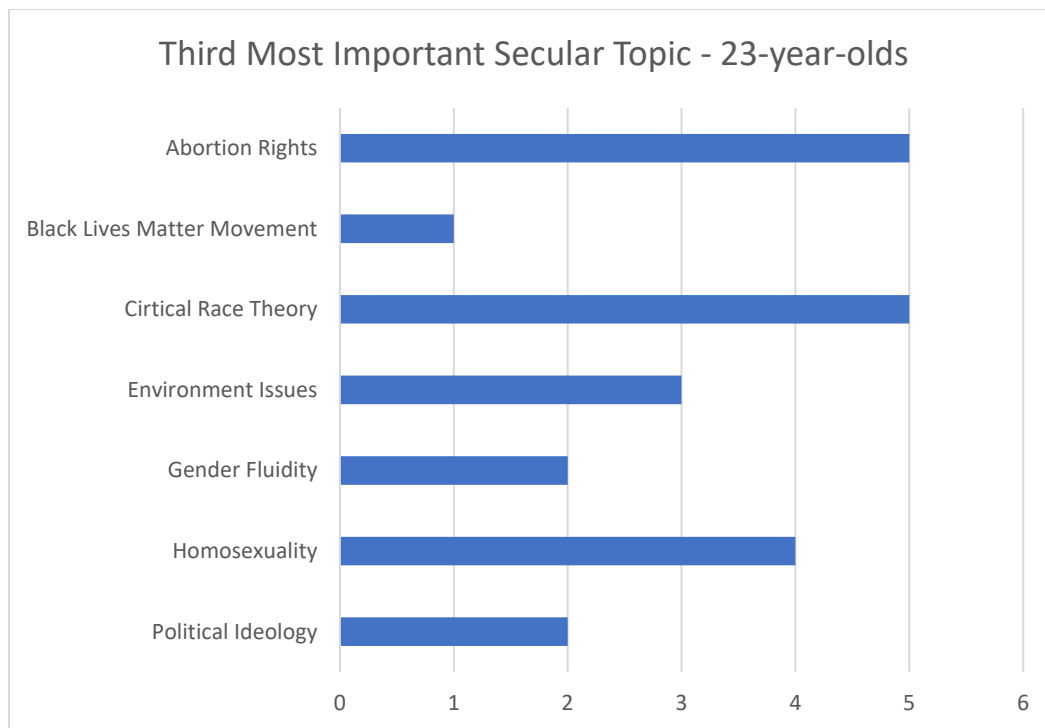**Figure 55. Third Most Important Secular Topic – 23-year-olds**
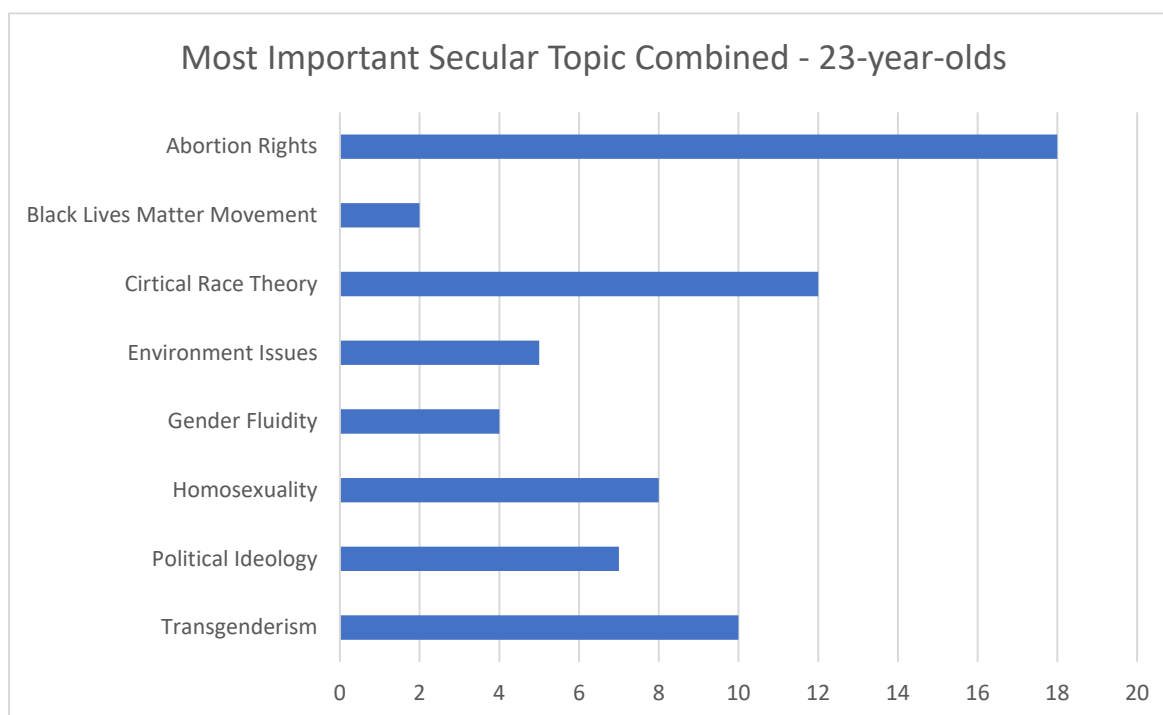
Figure 56. Most Important Secular Topic Combined 23-year-olds

Abortion rights remain the *Most Important* selection for 23-year-old participants in the survey. In the *Second Most Important* category, transgenderism saw increased votes, along with CRT, homosexuality, and abortion. Selections for CRT and abortion showed equal numbers of responses in the *Third Most Important* slot. Both CRT and abortion also remain the top two choices in the combined tally.
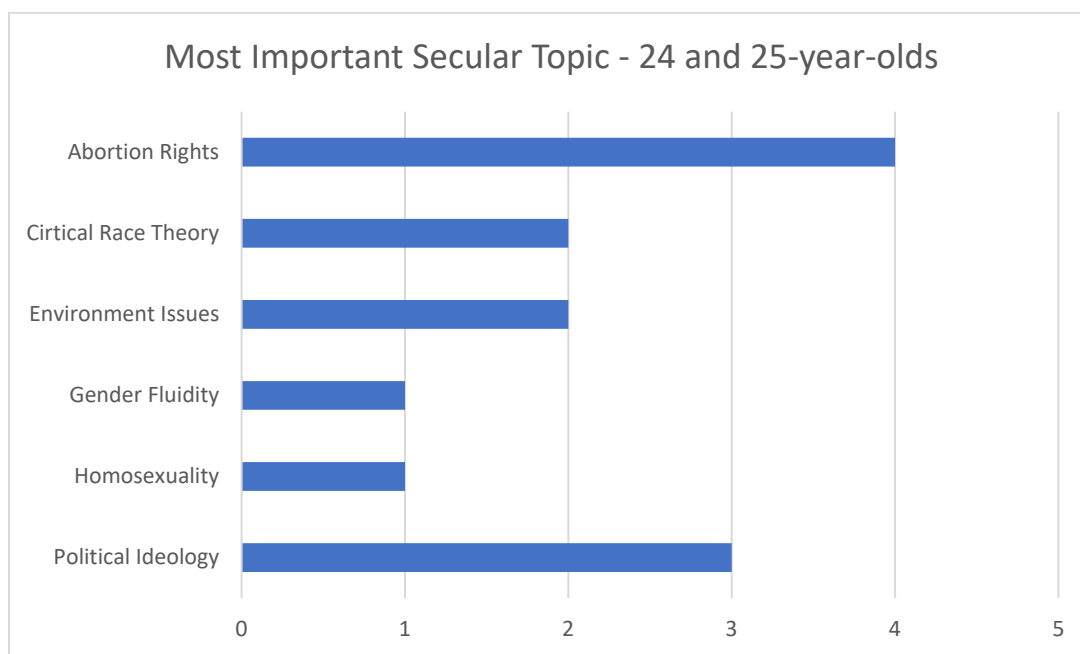
Figure 57. Most Important Secular Topic – 24 and 25-year-olds

Second Most Important Topic - 24 and 25-year olds

Topic	Value
Abortion Rights	3
Black Lives Matter Movement	1
Cirtical Race Theory	1
Environment Issues	2
Homosexuality	2
Political Ideology	2
Transgenderism	2
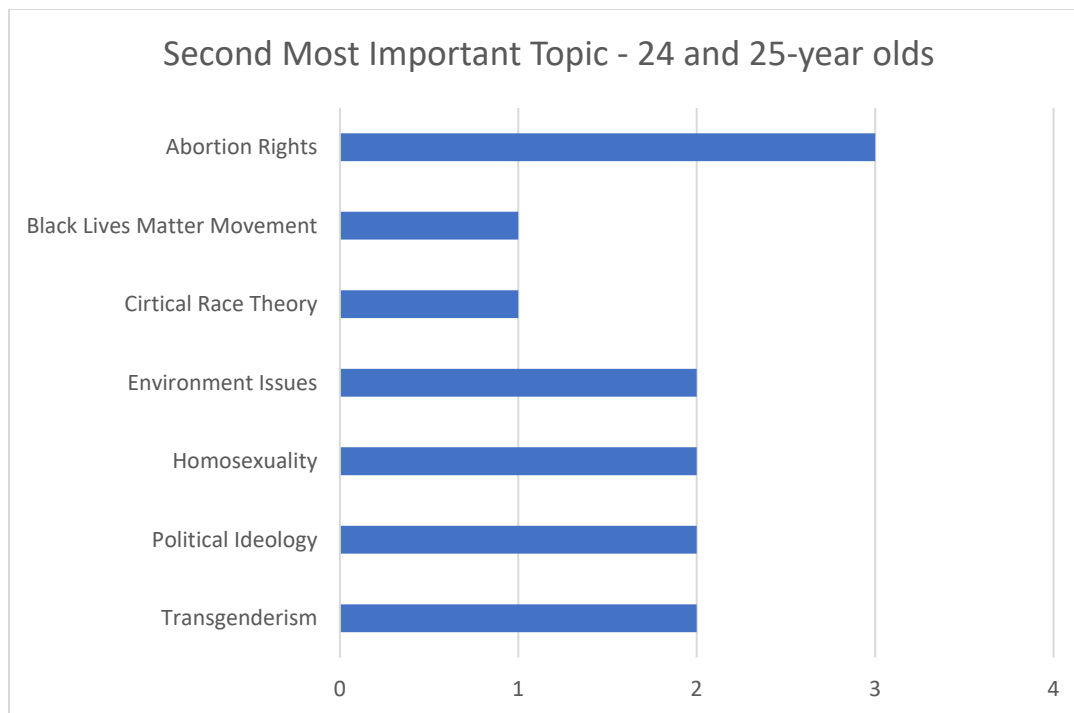
Figure 58. Second Most Important Secular Topic – 24 and 25-year-olds

Third Most Important Secular Topic - 24 and 25-year olds

Topic	Value
Abortion Rights	2
Black Lives Matter Movement	1
Cirtical Race Theory	1
Environment Issues	3
Gay Marriage	2
Gender Fluidity	1
Political Ideology	1
Transgenderism	2
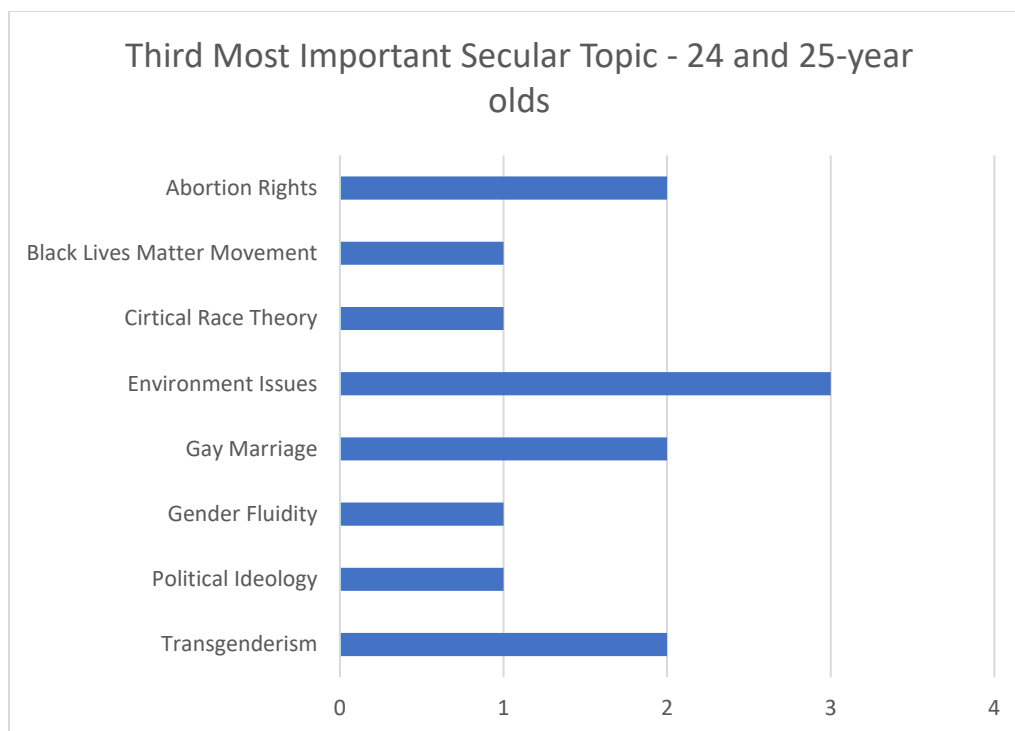
Figure 59. Third Most Important Secular Topic – 24 and 25-year-olds

Most Important Secular Topic Combined - 24 and 25-year-olds

Topic	Value
Abortion Rights	9
Black Lives Matter Movement	2
Cirtical Race Theory	4
Environment Issues	7
Gay Marriage	2
Gender Fluidity	2
Homosexuality	3
Political Ideology	6
Transgenderism	4
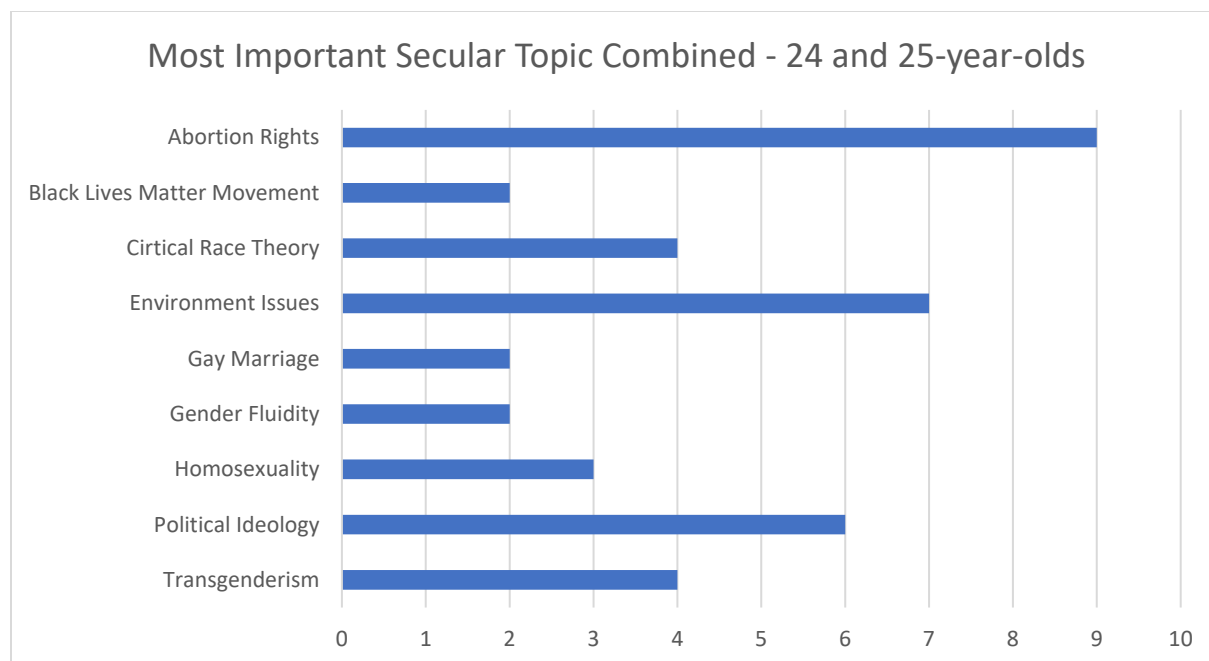
Figure 60. Most Important Secular Topics Combined 24 and 25-year-olds

The 24- and 25-year old-surveys were joined together, as there were significantly fewer participants in this age group. As with all other age groups, abortion received the most selections among 24- and 25-year olds. Political ideology also had a strong showing compared to the younger groups. Abortion remained at the top for *Second Most Important* topic in this age group, while respondents are split evenly between homosexuality, transgenderism, environmental concerns, and political ideology in the second option. The *Third Most Important* category shows environmental issues rising higher than any other secular issue, although abortion rights, gay marriage, and transgenderism show several responses as well. While abortion remains the top selection in the combined group, many students also chose environmental issues and political ideology across all three categories.
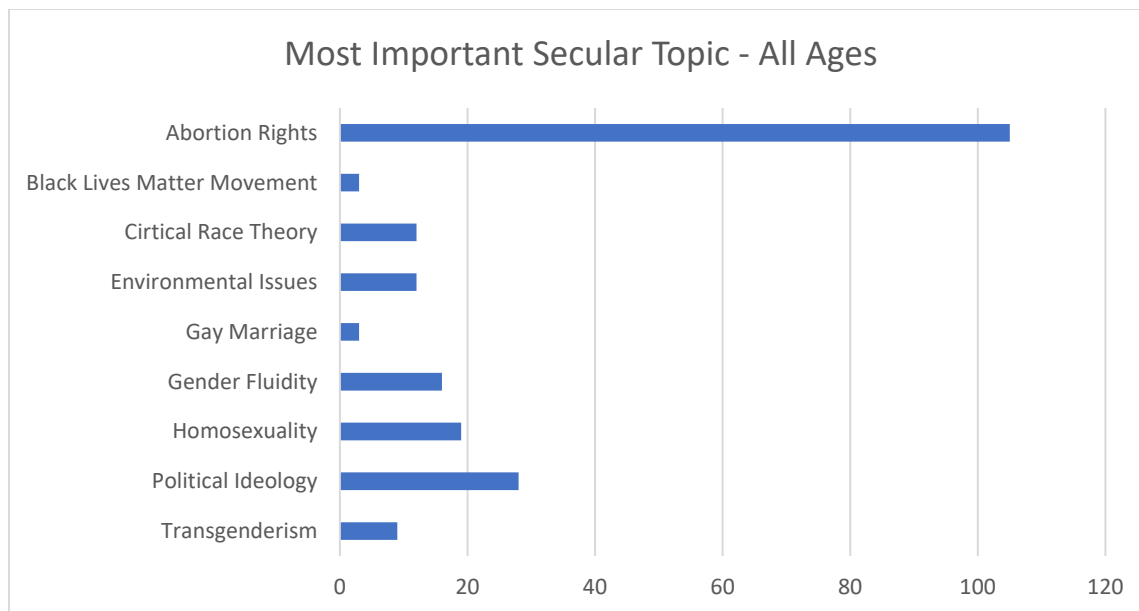
Figure 61. Most Important Secular Topic – All Ages
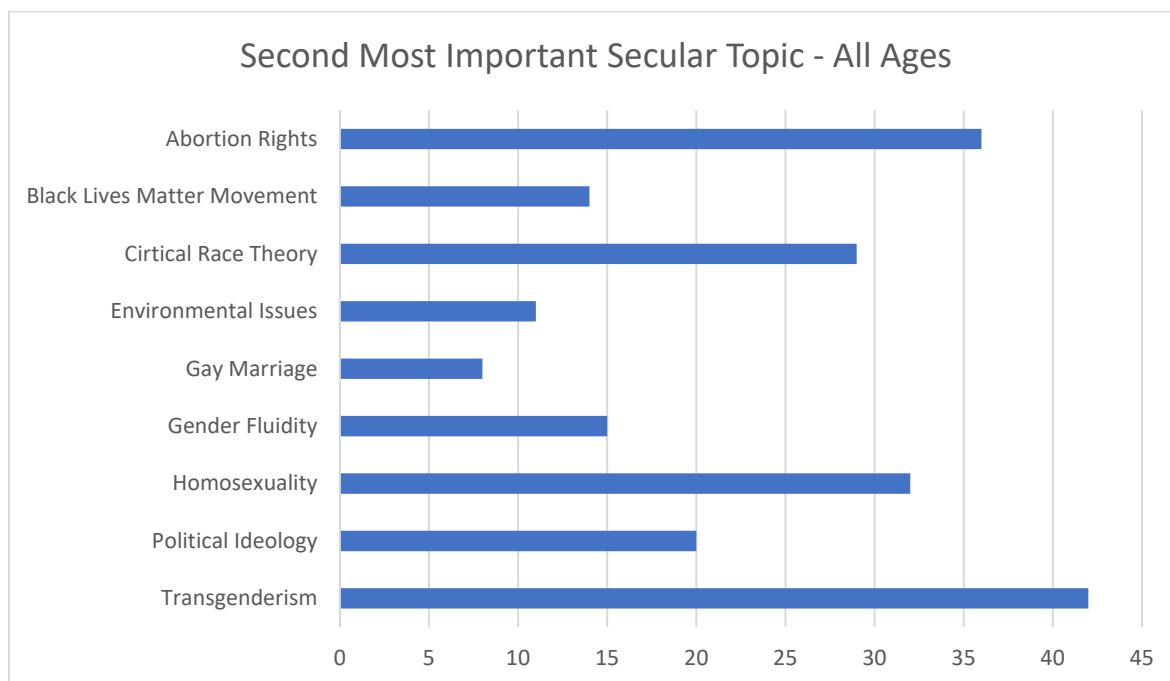
Figure 62. Second Important Secular Topic – All Ages
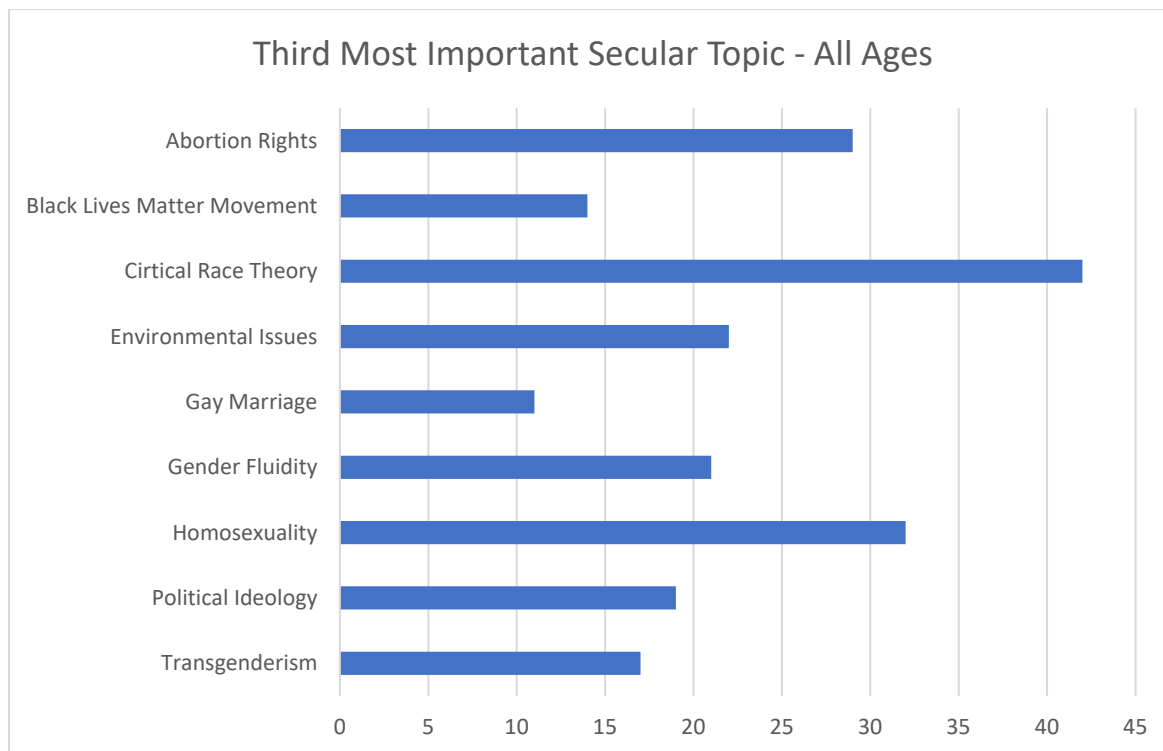
Figure 63. Third Most Important Secular Topic – All Ages

When combining all groups together, it is not surprising that abortion rights receive the highest number of votes for *Most Important* secular issue. Transgenderism gains the top spot in the *Second Most Important* issue when combining all age groups, although several other topics received multiple selections, including abortion, homosexuality, and CRT. In the *Third Most Important* category, CRT was chosen most frequently, with homosexuality and abortion rights earning numerous tallies as well.

The first, second, and third most selected secular issues by all age groups are combined into one bar chart, with abortion receiving the highest number of votes in all categories. Other topics that were chosen frequently includes CRT, homosexuality, transgenderism, and political ideology. These results are shown below in figure 64.
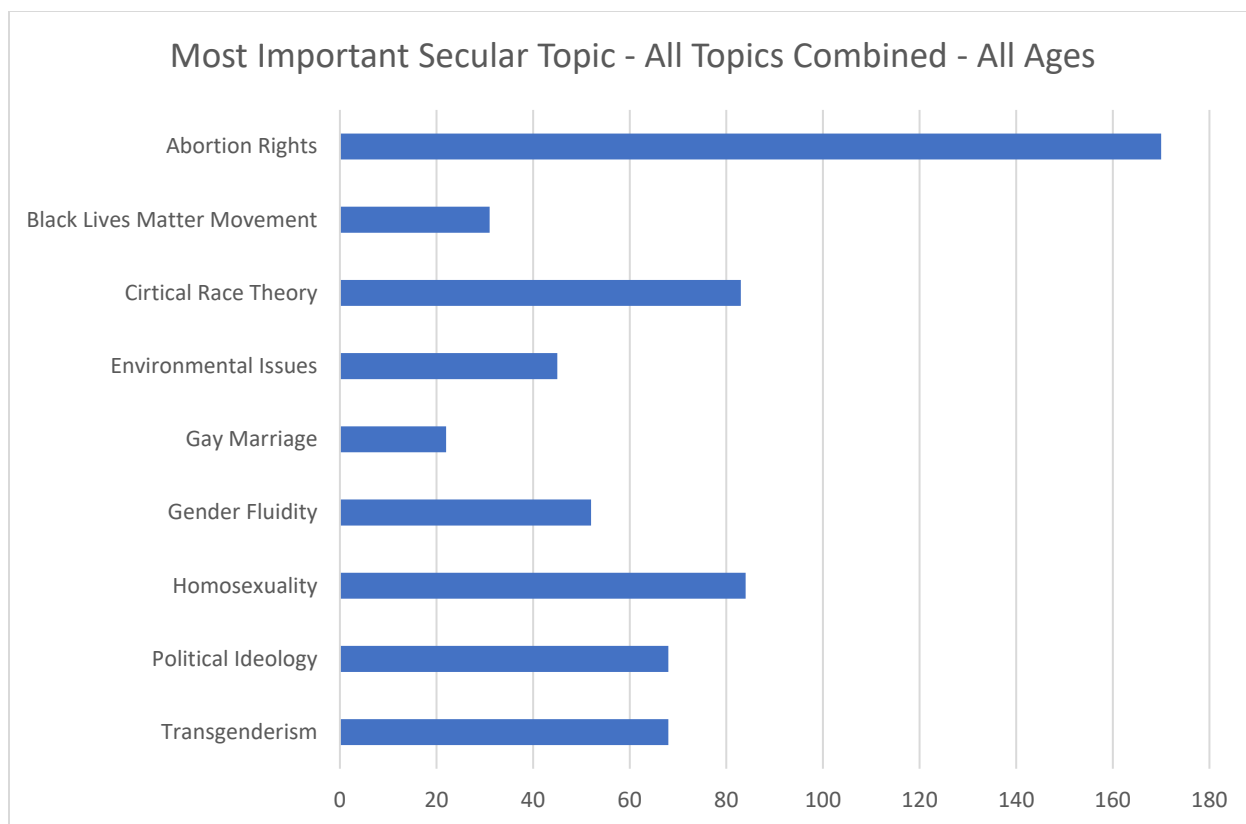
Figure 64. Most Important Topics – All Topics Combined – All Ages

Qualitative Results

Qualitative data were gathered by means of a focus group. According to the *Sage Handbook of Qualitative Data Collection,* "The strength of focus groups in this regard is the variety of different perspectives and experiences that participants reveal during their interactive discussion."[2] The focus group was moderator-driven with a prescribed set of four questions; however, the *Sage Handbook* further states, "a skilled moderator must make the necessary adaptations, taking into consideration the constraints of the instrument approved during the

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[2] Uwe Flick, ed., *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Data Collection* (London: Sage Publications Ltd., 2018), 251.

ethics review." Thus, the structure of the focus group is semi-structured, allowing participants to expand their responses to share open, personal responses.

The goal for focus group involvement was to encourage participation from Christian students at Liberty University and a local, secular university. Permission to open the focus group to students in the secular university was denied, resulting in a focus group comprised entirely of Liberty University students. While the plans for a mixed group did not materialize, the *Sage Handbook of Qualitative Data Collection* suggests, "Rich interactions can occur when carefully considering group composition and maximizing the potential for 'common ground' to elicit sharing and comparing."[3] Ultimately, a homogenous group resulted regarding university enrollment, and a heterogeneous sample was achieved among Liberty students, with three male and three female participants, as well as diversity in participant age and denomination. The personal information provided for each student is provided in table 16.

Table 16. Focus Group Participant Information

	Gender	Age	Denomination	Youth Group Participation
Participant 1	F	19	Baptist	Y
Participant 2	F	19	Pentecostal	Y
Participant 3	M	21	Baptist	Y
Participant 4	M	23	Southern Baptist	N
Participant 5	M	18	Non-denominational	N
Participant 6	F	18	Southern Baptist	Y

The first question posed to the focus group participants elicited a response to the topic of pastor and youth group messaging. Students were asked if the church leaders in their home churches offered guidance on the same secular topics that were included in the online survey: homosexuality, gay marriage, transgenderism, gender fluidity, CRT, BLM, abortion, and Green

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[3] Flick, *The Sage Handbook*, 254.

Agenda. Respondents were instructed to consider how messaging may have been delivered in corporate gatherings as well as on church websites and church or personal social media accounts.

Participant 1 indicates that secular topics were rarely addressed, noting that the pastor focused on biblical passages that related to repetitive topics. Secular issues may be implied through the passages selected; however, the topics were not openly preached in sermons. In youth group settings, Participant 1 states that students would occasionally try to engage in discussions about their sexuality. These questions were quickly addressed by the youth pastor with statements such as "that's not what the Bible says" and then the conversation was quickly diverted to another topic.

Participant 3 suggests that, generally, secular topics were not shared in the conservative environment of his home church. He states that on occasion, when a major event was happening in the country, such as a political election or the approval of the Gay Marriage Act in 2015, his pastor shared Scripture passages that addressed the topics and encouraged the congregation to consider what the Bible teaches regarding the highly publicized topics. Participant 3 further notes that during a youth gathering, when a student was attempting to present testimony affirming a secular issue, the youth pastor paused her testimony, called the student aside, and spoke to her privately. He would not allow the youth to continue sharing and the youth group just moved on without questioning what happened or why the testimony was halted.

Participant 6 explains that whenever the pastor shared insights into a secular topic, he would relate the discussion of secular movements as problems with today's culture. She recalls being personally offended by this terminology, as she believed her pastor was looking down on the younger generation and insinuating that everything related to current culture was wrong. Participant 6 shared that the secular topic most often presented in her home church was that of

BLM. As the participant attended a church that was comprised primarily of Caucasian members, Participant 6 recalls the messaging from her church to be mainly negative about BLM. She states that messaging indicated the destructive behavior of those who aligned with the BLM movement was unacceptable, yet also addressed reasons why those in the African American community may feel victimized. Participant 6 notes that her home youth group pastor and the other adults in the church attempted to tell the youth how they should think or feel about social issues. As a result, she opted to attend the youth group at a friend's church, where she felt the leaders were more respectful of the concerns raised by the students who attended youth gatherings. Participant 6 indicates that youth leaders in the church she visited recognized youth members who had friends or acquaintances in school or at work who held different values regarding homosexuality, gay marriage, transgenderism, abortion, and other secular topics. Instead of asserting that these issues were wrong, the general message relayed by the youth pastor was focused on how to love others even when they had values that differed from those held by the students and the church.

Participant 5 reveals that he did not have a positive experience at churches he attended as a teenager. He states that pastors did not deliver messages that aligned with God's word but, instead, were more focused on growing the church. Regarding youth group, Participant 5 notes that youth leaders advised students not to judge people for their ideals, for what they believe or don't believe, or for causes they do or do not support. He implies that youth leaders were attempting to get the teens to think for themselves and draw their own conclusions about various topics. Participant 5 indicated that his youth group was ineffective because the students were not aware of what was going on in the world and were not presented with enough information to form conclusions. Ultimately, Participant 5 states that he became disillusioned with the youth group and stopped attending events.

Participant 2 expresses that her home church pastor addressed most of the topics presented in this study. She indicates that her pastor wanted those attending worship to gain their insights from the church and not from the world. As someone who now serves in a youth leadership role, Participant 2 admits that young people are confused about the LGBTQ movement. Teaching alongside her mom, she explains to youth group members that it is important not to discriminate against others, but that Christians must also be clear that we do not support beliefs that go against biblical teaching.

Participant 4 states the church he attended was extremely conservative and never addressed liberal topics at worship. Given the location of his hometown, he implied that this was a similar theme amongst other churches in the area. Participant 4 further indicates that he did not attend youth group, nor did his church have a youth pastor.

An extension to the first question about messaging also encouraged the focus group members to comment on the use of social media to promote the views of the church or of the leadership team. Most of the students in the focus group state that social media was not a common medium for their pastor or youth pastor to share information. Participant 1 says that secular issues, especially LGBTQ, were not mentioned in social media, as church leadership did not want to be associated with any topics that were in opposition to biblical teaching. Participant 4 implies that the strong, conservative-leaning of his church left no room for other interpretations of Scripture, so while all people were welcomed if they came to church, there was no use of social media or church publications to extend invitations or declare the church's position on social issues. On the topic of social media, Participant 6 explains that her church welcomed all but clearly stated in publications and social media that people choosing an alternative lifestyle could not be hired by the church, nor could they be ordained to serve as a minister. During the

focus group meeting, Participant 3 opened the church website on his phone and provided the

following information that addresses key aspects of the LGBTQ movement, as well as the

definition of marriage:

- Marriage, the uniting of one man and one woman in a covenant commitment for a

  lifetime.

- Children from the moment of conception are a blessing, an inheritance from the Lord

- Man is the special creation of God made in his own image. He created them male and

  female, as the crowning work of his creation.

Participant 3 further explains the mention of God's creation being male and female on his

church's website clearly indicates that specifically assigned gender is part of the goodness of

God's creation. Participant 5 states that at one time, the pastor offered social media messages

indicating that his church welcomed people in the LGBTQ community. The student further notes

that this tactic was not well-received by the members of the church and harmed the pastor's

efforts at inclusion.

As a result of the discussion on the inclusion or exclusion of secular topics and pastoral

messages, several students raise concerns about how secular issues should be addressed in the

church or if they should be addressed at all. Participant 4 suggests that people of all ages, not just

youth, need to be responsible for seeking out the truth on issues relating to the world. He notes

the availability of information on the internet that could be researched and compared to

Scripture, indicating that it should not be the job of the church alone to guide on secular issues.

Participant 5 suggests the church must focus on helping seekers develop a relationship with God,

not necessarily on preaching to them about what is right or wrong. He further states that once

people have a relationship, God would provide clarity on secular and ethical values. Participant 2

voices an opposing stance, stating that the church should play a more prevalent role in talking about secular issues. In her view, the church must be proactive in teaching believers the Word of God and relating truth to the issues that Christians face in the world every day. By hearing and meditating on the Word, Christians would be more inclined to obey the Word (Josh. 1:8). Participant 2 also notes that by not talking about issues, the church is showing fear of being shut down for speaking out against topics that are not aligned with God's Word. Participant 3 aligns with the statements of Participant 2, indicating that if it is addressed in the Bible, then the church must teach on the subject.

The next question presented to the focus group dealt with how the students processed the information that was shared through messages at worship, youth events, or social media presence. Students were asked to share methods of discerning whether they should accept or reject the perspectives of their denomination and their church leaders. While all participants note a conservative upbringing dictated their views at a young age, there is a wide variety of responses, with some students seeking insight through the internet and Scripture while others discuss topics with friends and family.

Participant 6 speaks about the values instilled by her parents, noting that if it was "good enough for her parents, it was good enough for her." Yet, as she got older and started to expand her group of friends, the messages that she heard in church and from her family were tested by what she observed in her own social circles. Participant 6 further expresses confusion about certain secular topics and notes that she would listen to apologists on the internet, which also helped to shape her opinions on multiple topics. Closing comments made by Participant 6 on this topic affirm that she continues to investigate on her own. While she still holds many of the same

values as her parents, there are some topics that she is still trying to figure out as she shapes her own opinions.

Participant 5 shares similar statements about specific values and belief systems being ingrained from a young age. He suggests that his mother sheltered him from the world and that his upbringing in Christian schools restricted him from learning about prominent social issues. Participant 5 states that he now relies on his own research, as well as interactions with his friends and peers, to shape his ideas on secular topics.

As one who was homeschooled, Participant 4 also indicates that he was indoctrinated into the values embraced by his church. Yet, he also knew that he had to develop his own faith. Participant 4 comments that he had always been taught that the world could be seen through a lens of black and white (right or wrong) based on Scripture. He declares that he did not know there were "gray areas" in life until he did an internship at another church. Participant 3 maintains the authority of Scripture and used internet searches to confirm if various topics aligned with the truth of the Bible.

Participant 1 expresses that her friends had varying levels of understanding and viewpoints on secular issues. She notes that friends at school often expressed more liberal views on social issues, while her church friends maintained a conservative-leaning on the same themes. Since her home church did not generally share messages on secular issues, Participant 1 indicates that she sought to gain clarity on these topics by listening to the arguments made between friends from church and those from her school.

The church attended by Participant 3 was also conservative and rarely discussed secular issues. He notes that much of what he believes today came from his strong involvement in politics when he was a teenager. As he began to research Scripture, he discovered that his

political leanings were intertwined with the values spelled out in Christianity. Participant 3 comments that he now believes that his background in conservative politics and his personal study of the Bible fully align and are the foundation of his strong faith.

Of the six participants in the study, only Participant 2 shares that she generally seeks input from her family when it comes to making decisions about secular issues. Since her parents and grandparents have been actively involved in ministry, she believes it is natural for her to rely on their biblical knowledge to better understand confusing topics. Participant 2 also notes that her hometown is very small and that most of her friends also attended the same church. Since they shared the same beliefs, it was much easier to stay the course in her faith journey when school friends tried to persuade her to an opposing viewpoint.

All participants in the focus group have moved away from home and are now living on campus or near the campus. Separated from their home church, family, and friends, participants were asked to provide details about the church that they are now attending since enrolling at Liberty. Most of the students comment that the churches around campus are very similar to what they experienced at home. Participant 5 states that as a freshman, he is still seeking to find the right church. His experience with church growing up was negative in general, and he is hoping to find a church that aligns with his values without being hypocritical against people who believe differently. Although attending a Baptist church at home, Participant 1 has found a home at a non-denominational church where the pastor preaches more about secular topics, addressing them "head-on" and providing statistics and Scripture to back up his statements. Participant 4 expresses his ability to worship more freely here than in his more conservative church at home. He states that while the belief system between the two churches aligns, he appreciates the energy and lively aspects of worship, which are in stark contrast to the more solemn worship

experiences at home. Participants 2, 3, and 6 all indicate that as worship majors, they are all actively involved in the choir at the same Baptist church in Lynchburg. For Participant 2, the worship is quite different, as she is from a Pentecostal background. She had hoped to find a church more like the one in her hometown but has shifted her focus to serving the Lord through music. Upon arriving at Liberty, Participant 6 concludes that most of the churches in this area are similar in their beliefs and worship practices. She emphasizes that she decided where to attend church not by how others worshiped but by her desire to serve God. Participant 6 senses that those leading on the platform each work had a similar heart for serving and worship, which eased her decision-making process. Participant 3 is new to Liberty this term and has not visited many churches. He states that when he first arrived in town, before visiting a church, he searched the internet for local churches to ensure that the views of the church aligned with his values. He notes that the information he reviewed on one church website did not align with what was being taught at the service he attended. Like Participants 2 and 6, he is a worship major and is now serving in the choir as part of his degree program. He indicates that the values of the church align with his Baptist upbringing, and he feels comfortable with his choice and the messages being delivered.

In the next segment of the focus group, students were asked to speak about the secular topic that they believe is the most pressing in our current culture. The topic choices were the same as those presented in the online survey and included homosexuality, gay marriage, transgenderism, gender fluidity, CRT, BLM, abortion, and the green environment/agenda. Three of the responses centered on issues surrounding the LGBTQ community, while the other three participants raised concerns about abortion, BLM, and environmental issues.

Participant 3 was the first to respond to this question, sharing very strong views on abortion and the rights of the unborn. He states that his political leanings weighed heavily on the topic but that, ultimately, his stance is Bible-based. At the outset of his response, Participant 3 supports his views by sharing portions of Scripture (Psalm 139:13–16). He shares a personal story about two friends in high school. After discovering his girlfriend was pregnant, Participant 3 explains that his male friend was trying to convince the girl to have an abortion. Feeling strongly about the rights of the unborn, Participant 3 intervened and counseled both his friends, who eventually decided to keep their baby. He indicates that the couple is still together and raising their son but lamented over the number of infants who are killed each year due to abortion. Participant 3 expresses gratitude for the overturning of *Roe versus Wade* and noted he remains a convicted supporter of the right to life for the unborn.

Participant 4 agrees with Participant 3 about concerns over abortion but notes that a major topic for him is the push for a Green Agenda and the ongoing battle to save the environment. As one who grew up in the Midwest, this participant declares his firm opposition to those who are insisting that the nation move to electric vehicles and attempting to stop the completion of pipelines to carry oil and natural gas. Participant 4 grew up in a community of farmers who depend on fossil fuels to prepare their land and harvest their crops. He notes that in the bigger cities where infrastructure could more easily be established, the expectation of aligning with the Green Agenda might be a simpler choice, but for those in rural areas, it is not feasible. Participant 4 had disclosed earlier that his church did not address secular issues, so his views are based solely on geographical location and the needs of farmers.

Participant 1 names abortion and several aspects of LGBTQ as the most concerning issue facing the church. She reminds the group that there is a large LGBTQ population in her

hometown and that her home church failed to address these topics regularly. She noted her top concerns revolve around those who claim to be Christian and yet openly admit they are gay, lesbian, or transgender. Participant 1 also comments on the fact that many of her Christian friends claim to be pro-choice, which goes against church teachings.

Participant 6 focuses on the topic of homosexuality as the key secular topic facing young people and how the church has addressed the issue. She argues that abortion is a black-and-white issue "because if you can prove that a fetus is and living beings deserve to not be killed for no reason, then abortion is pretty indefensible." Participant 6 highlights the fact that younger generations struggle more with homosexuality and view it differently than those who are older. She emphasizes that the church teaches this type of "romance" is wrong, yet needs to provide more clear teaching to explain why it is wrong.

Participant 5 initially focuses on topics relating to the LGBTQ community. He states that many churches come across as hostile towards people who identify as gay, lesbian, or transgender. He indicates that the best way to address the situation in the church is to be more welcoming so that those who choose alternative lifestyles will come to church. Participant 5 conveys that if those in the LGBTQ community are not coming to church to hear the truth, then it is unrealistic to think that they will change their views. Later in the discussion, Participant 5 also raises concerns about BLM. He states there is a difference between BLM as a statement and BLM as a corporation. Participant 5 agrees with the statement that black lives matter and that historically, our nation has disrespected and disavowed the African American community because of the color of their skin. Yet, he also states that he despises BLM as an organization due to the fraudulent acts that have occurred, as leaders of the movement have used funds inappropriately and encouraged violence in cities across the country. Participant 5 believes that

people need to be made aware of the differences between the "truth" and the "lies" associated with BLM so they can better understand the movement.

Participant 2 offers the final response to the question on the most important secular issues. She asserts that transgenderism and gender fluidity are troubling matters that clearly go against church teachings and expresses great concern over those who desire to change their assigned sex. In her opinion, those who align with this type of thinking are indicating that they "own themselves" and have the right to determine their sex. Participant 2 posits that, in reality, God owns everyone, and the gender that He assigned at birth is part of His perfect plan.

The final question posed to the focus group inquired about how each participant addresses social issues with those they encounter. The goal was to determine how they witness to others who may hold views or beliefs that are different from their own. Responses to this question were varied, with some students indicating that they would hold firm to biblical teachings, while others would either not address the issues or speak in a way that appears to align with the ideals of the social gospel movement.

Participant 1 offers a brief response to the question, signaling that her main goal is to stay respectful of others when talking about social issues. She again refers to her hometown and the large numbers of people who aligned themselves with the LGBTQ community and implies that those who speak out against alternative lifestyle choices would be "beaten down," so it was better to remain quiet. Participant 1 indicates that she would express love for those who aligned with LGBTQ values. She states that while she supported the *person*, she did not support their lifestyle choices. Participant 1 notes that she offered the same advice to people who had differing opinions on other social topics.

Participant 2 speaks about those in her school who opposed her Christian views. She openly shared her religious beliefs prompting others in her school to ridicule her or encourage her to drink at parties. While she was not afraid to speak directly to peers about biblical teachings, Participant 2 used social media to address secular topics. She would often receive replies from classmates, raising more questions. Participant 2 states that her goal was to speak the truth, sharing Scriptures that related directly to the secular issues being discussed on her site.

Participant 3 begins his response by sharing that he has been attacked verbally in the past for his political views and that both he and his parents have been fired from jobs due to their strong conservative beliefs. Participant 3 is not afraid to be outspoken but comments that he would often wait for others to ask him before directly addressing someone with an opposing viewpoint. He recalls his time in high school when he was very focused on political issues. He would purposefully wear t-shirts with sayings that were controversial, hoping that someone would ask him about his views. Participant 3 shares a story of conversing with two people in an airport after they called him out for wearing a shirt supporting a Republican candidate they believed was racist. After speaking to the people for two hours, Participant 3 indicates that the people he addressed converted to his perspective. While he no longer "baits" others into such conversations, Participant 3 is ready to defend his views and does not *hold back* when speaking to issues that he believes are important to his life and his faith.

Participant 4 suggests that in today's culture, everyone is encouraged to believe what they want and are focused on themselves. He asserts that people are cemented in their own beliefs, and others are afraid to share their views or get into arguments about social topics. Participant 4 comments that as he has gotten older, he is more inclined to point to biblical passages and provide information to those who may be confused about a topic. While he does not argue with

people, he expresses that he is not afraid to speak out and share what he believes to be true based on Scripture.

Participant 5 argues that the best way to witness to others is to show them the love of Jesus before you try to engage them verbally about topics of disagreement. He further suggests that allowing others to observe him living a life of compassion would open the door to discussions. Participant 5 reports that as peers asked about secular issues, he would share insights about how he was raised, what the Bible says about issues, and what he believes. According to Participant 5, the most important part of the process is not to push others into a quick decision but to speak the truth and allow them to come to their own conclusions.

The response provided by Participant 6 reveals a level of discomfort in trying to witness to others about secular issues. She states that she had lived a somewhat sheltered life and did not know enough about the world to make judgments about the decisions of other people. As she has gotten older, Participant 6 comments that her goal is not to approach others or try to change their minds but rather to observe and learn more about the environments in which they live and the reasons behind their lifestyle choices. Participant 6 takes a strong stand on the topic of abortion, as she believes solidly in the sanctity of life. She also shares that being in a close friendship with someone was a prerequisite to offering advice or opinions on secular issues. Participant 6 explains that she was "not going to be pretentious and try to change what they believe. I'm going to try and learn from them first."

Conclusion

Quantitative and qualitative data were gathered according to the prescribed methodology. The survey results were coded and analyzed using SPSS indicating multiple points of significance within the data. The narrative responses to each of the questions posed to the focus

group were presented, providing additional insight into the research. The findings of the study

are included in chapter 5.

Chapter Five: Conclusions

Introduction

This chapter includes an overview of the study and presents conclusions based on the findings of the research. The data exhibited in chapter 4 is explored and discussed in relation to key aspects of the study. Further, the results are interpreted for others to discern the implications to worship ministry application.

Summary of the Study

This study examines the perceptions of college-aged students regarding secular messages that are prevalent in the current woke culture. Specifically, the participants share details of their home church's presentation of secular topics by the pastor and youth pastor and in promotional materials, such as church publications and social media. The focus is on providing students the opportunity to express their impressions of how their home churches address the topics of homosexuality, gay marriage, transgenderism, gender fluidity, Critical Race Theory (CRT), the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, abortion, and topics related to the Green Agenda and emphasis on the environment. These topics are reviewed in light of the frequency of messages delivered in weekly worship gatherings and youth events to reveal any impact on the worship and witness of college-aged students.

Overview of the Problem

Throughout history, Christians have looked to the church and church pastors for guidance on ethics and values related to faith. As the nation has moved through tumultuous times, the teachings of the church, based on the authority of Scripture, provide the plumb line for believers. In recent years, various denominational and non-denominational churches have begun to

integrate secular teachings that are driven by culture. Some have adopted messaging in sermons, websites, and church materials that indicate a more welcoming stance regarding LGBTQ+ and other topics related to social justice issues. Not only has this integration caused a split in many churches, but it has also resulted in uncertainty among believers regarding the interpretation of Scripture. The shift to being more accepting of the woke agenda is especially confusing for college-aged students who are inundated with messaging from the world through the vehicle of social media. In the past, churches provided clear teaching on moral issues, which made it easy for believers to assess whether topics aligned with Scripture; however, the lines between right and wrong are now less certain. The reluctance of some churches to remain firm in long-standing biblical teachings invites young adults to explore alternative beliefs that are freely accepted in society.

Purpose Statement

This study raises awareness of the impact of church teachings on the lives of young adults. Its purpose is to explore the current practices of churches in presenting messages on topics of homosexuality, gay marriage, transgenderism, gender fluidity, CRT, BLM, abortion, and green environment issues. As these topics all connect to the Woke agenda, the study specifically examines the use of social media to present church and leadership stances on Woke topics, whether the pastors and youth leaders present Woke ideology in a positive or negative light, and the frequency of these messages. The primary focus is to determine the ways in which Woke messaging affects student perceptions of the topics and how church and leadership messaging influence student acceptance or rejection of the Woke agenda.

Research Questions

The central research question of this study is: As mainline Christian denominational churches adjust messaging and theological belief statements to adopt the progressive values of Woke Religion, in what ways are they impacting the worship and the witness of college-age students? Particular emphasis is placed on providing specificity in the following areas:

1. Of those churches represented in this study who have shifted their values, what percentage of churches actively preach messages that highlight Woke ideology directly from the pulpit during Sunday worship?

2. With what frequency are messages that highlight Woke ideology being expressed at youth group meetings?

3. In what ways has Woke ideology changed the content of sermons and church messaging?

4. How has Woke ideology impacted students' views of the Word of God?

5. How have student's personal beliefs changed regarding social justice issues?

Review of the Methodology

This study employs a mixed methods research design and emphasizes the convergence of quantitative and qualitative data. This approach is used to offer a more complete analysis of the research topic. The tools used to gather the data were an online, anonymous survey that was distributed at two Christian universities and an in-person focus group comprised of six Liberty University students.

Overview of the Sample, Data Collection, and Analysis

In this study, the focus is to engage young adult Christians to explore their current perceptions of Woke ideology and how their understanding is reflected in their own worship and witness to other people. Participation in this study is limited to Christian students who are

between the ages of 18 and 25. Students must also have attended worship at least two times per month. The quantitative tool utilized in this research is an online survey that was distributed through two Christian universities. Data collected from this survey are tabulated and analyzed using SPSS software. The qualitative aspect of the study is gathered through an in-person focus group of college students from Liberty University who meet the participation criteria. An online coding tool, Delve, was used to upload the transcription from the focus group discussions and then coded by response topic. Analysis is conducted to uncover points where the responses to the online survey questions and the focus group discussions converged.

<div align="center">Synopsis of the Major Findings</div>

The results of this mixed methods research indicate a partial confirmation of the researcher's premise that church messaging impacts student perceptions of Woke topics. A Pearson Correlation analysis exhibits significant relationships across many of the questions discussed in the survey. Regular worship attendance appears to solidify student perceptions of various issues in the study. Significance is noted in denominational alignment with the various topics as well. There is a strong correlation between attendance and student responses to affirm or dispute the importance of the Woke agenda items in the study. Responses indicate that students either affirm or dispute all based on their attendance and their denomination's alignment with the stated issues. However, there is a higher rate of deviation in responses from students on the topics of BLM and issues surrounding the green environment. Qualitative discussions convey similar responses, with strong alignment to denominational, church messaging, and pastoral teaching on specific topics, with some divergence on the topics of BLM and the Green Agenda.

Unexpected Findings

In this research, it was anticipated that students would submit consistent responses to the question of whether they affirm or dispute each Woke topic presented in the study. This is based on the premise that students who attend churches that align with conservative biblical messaging and those who are more accepting of Woke issues would respond in a homogeneous manner to the church's stance on all topics. The most unexpected finding in the research conducted for this study is the uncertainty in responses regarding social justice issues. Regardless of whether the students selected a specific denominational alignment or indicated that they attend a non-denominational church, there is a higher number of students who are unsure about their stances on the topics of CRT, BLM, and green environment. The deviation in the topic of CRT is more moderate, while responses to questions on BLM and green environment are strong. Details of these unexpected findings will be addressed further in the Conclusions section.

Conclusions

This section offers a summary of conclusions drawn based on the findings. As presented in chapter 2, a review of existing literature reveals numerous scholarly works which indicate the need for acceptance and conformity to social justice teachings and Woke ideology. While several studies have been completed that promote Woke topics, significant analysis of the effects of Woke-affirming messages has not been conducted. This study presents a unique voice in scholarly research on the discussion of the impact of woke religion on the worship and witness of college-aged students. This section provides a discussion of the overall conclusions, implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

As this study is grounded in a biblical worldview, the scriptural foundations for this study and the discussion presented in the text-based literature review raise concerns about the

integration of Woke ideology in the church. Several mainline churches were identified in the Literature Review as becoming more accepting and/or welcoming of Woke religion, while the Baptist Church has generally maintained its traditional biblical worldview. The hypothesis of the researcher is that churches that have shifted their views on Woke topics are impacting the way college-aged adults view worship and witness to others. The refusal of universities to participate in this study has limited the data gathered. Due to the lack of denominational churches represented, the results cannot attest to the effect of preaching in churches where Woke ideology is affirmed. For this reason, the study has failed to reject or accept the hypothesis due to inconclusive data; however, some general conclusions can be drawn from the data that provide meaningful insight into the discussion.

<center>Preaching and Denominational Connection</center>

As noted above, there was a lack of participation from students in mainline denominational churches that have openly adjusted their stance on these Woke topics. Survey submissions reveal that 91.8% of all students selected either Baptist, non-denominational, or other as their church affiliation. For this reason, the research is not able to pinpoint the percentage of secular messages from churches that claim receptivity to Woke topics. However, all participants were asked if sermons were delivered in their churches that emphasized Woke ideology. In all seven topics, the research indicates there is a significant relationship between church alignment and Woke messages. Survey results also show a significant relationship between the frequency of pastoral sermons and messages being delivered by youth pastors that present Woke topics as well. Overall, these results suggest that students are hearing messages on Woke topics from church leadership, and therefore, it is vital that the information they receive is aligned with biblical truth. As Owen Strachan warns, "Few know enough about these ideologies

to respond to them biblically; fewer still are speaking up to distinguish the truth from the counterfeit. As a result, some Christians are going woke–or pondering if they should."[1] The church needs to remain firm in its teaching of biblical truths so that young adults and other members of the flock are not led astray.

<div align="center">Church and Denominational Alignment</div>

Survey results also indicate a strong relationship between church alignment and denominational alignment. This suggests that most churches are following the guidelines set forth by the denomination of which they are a part. Survey responses submitted by students who align with the Baptist denomination more consistently dispute the woke religious topics than those who attend non-denominational churches and students who either selected or were assigned to the category of *Other* due to the lack of denominational representation. Thus, a direct correlation can be made between the biblical teachings of the Baptist church and the alignment to those views by Baptist students in this study.

<div align="center">Conclusions from Qualitative Discussion</div>

The qualitative aspect of this study was gathered from six Liberty University students who participated in a live focus group. The insight gained about the students' family life. and home churches contributed to the discussions. Students who participated in the focus group all indicate they were raised in a conservative-leaning household. As part of the conversation, several students also note they were home-schooled. While upbringing was not part of the analysis done for this study, it was evident that most of the students in the group were impacted by the beliefs and values of their parents. Every student in the group emphasizes that their

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[1] Owen Strachan, *Christianity and Wokeness: How the Social Justice Movement is Hijacking the Gospel– and the Way to Stop It* (Washington, DC: Salem Books, 2021), 35.

parents consistently spoke to them about faith and the truths of Scripture. Additionally, most of the focus group participants state that their home churches did not regularly preach on secular issues. The students further indicate that when messages were presented in worship or at youth events, Woke topics were typically addressed negatively. The conversation regarding the delivery of Woke messaging suggests that pastors and youth leaders would utilize Scripture to discredit theories associated with Woke ideology, especially on topics related to abortion, homosexuality, gay marriage, transgenderism, and gender fluidity. This aligns with insights from Strachan, who declares that Christians need only look to Scripture for answers to questions about justice, unity, and humanity. Strachan infers, "Our dependence on Scripture is intentional and unmissable. Though many today operate as if academic theory or social activism should supplement Christian thought and practice, in truth the Bible is sufficient for these things…the Bible gives us exactly what we need to find unity, hope, and justice in this world."[2] Since each student states that their parents and their church leaders disputed Woke topics, these results indicate that families seem inclined to attend a church that has the same values they desire to instill in their children; they want their children to hear biblical truth in their home and in their church.

While each of the participants comments on strong biblical teaching in their homes and teachings, an interesting divergence is noted in the methods students use to witness to others. The four older students are more unswerving in their views and comment they would unequivocally share biblical truths with those who have adopted alternative lifestyles that are not supported in Scripture. Alternatively, the two youngest members of the group hold a more reserved stance on sharing scriptural truths with their peers regarding secular topics. Both

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[2] Strachan, *Christianity and Wokeness,* 7.

underscore the sheltered home in which they were brought up, with one of the teens stating a need to better understand other viewpoints.

The two eighteen-year-olds state that they prefer to love and accept people as they choose to live, especially on topics related to LGBTQ. The reasoning cited for this viewpoint is that alternative lifestyle choices do not directly harm others, as is the case with abortion, which is obviously wrong because an unborn life is being taken. The uncertainty expressed by the two youngest members of the group appears to be indicative of the writings of Marshall Kirk and Hunter Madsen, in their text, *After the Ball: How America Will Conquer Its Fear and Hatred of Gays in the '90s*. Kirk and Madsen provide the following four tenets:

1. Change the flamboyant, sexually addicted stereotype of gays by portraying them as normal Americans who are a significant minority in every community;

2. Make homosexuality a matter of biological determinism, not moral choice

3. Portray opponents of homosexual behavior as hateful bigots who should be stigmatized, silenced, and equated with Jim Crow racists; and

4. Portray LGBTQ rights as the new civil rights, with members of the LGBTQ community portrayed as the victims.[3]

Scott David Allen explains this strategy has been successful largely by efforts made over the past twenty-five years in entertainment and celebrity culture. He recalls that LGBTQ behaviors have been normalized through pop artists such as Brittany Spears and Madonna, movies such as Brokeback Mountain, which received multiple Oscar awards, and several sitcoms that were

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[3] Marshall Kirk and Hunter Madsen, *After the Ball: How America Will Conquer Its Fear and Hatred of Gays in the 90s* (New York: Plume, 1990).

popular in the same decade.[4] While the comments of the four other participants in the focus group solidly align with traditional Christian values and biblical teaching, the wavering comments of the younger students speak to the success of the tactics taken by those who are pushing to normalize lifestyles and other aspects of the Woke agenda.

<div align="center">Deviation of Responses to Social Justice Topics</div>

As mentioned in the section on unexpected findings, one of the most surprising outcomes of the study is the level of uncertainty regarding the affirmation or dispute over the topics of BLM, the Green Agenda, and at a more moderate level, CRT. The results of the survey show consistent responses to abortion and issues surrounding LGBTQ; however, the topics more closely aligned with social justice show a higher level of uncertainty among respondents. This section offers a discussion of these findings.

BLM and CRT

The Civil Rights movement has gained more attention due to high-profile cases that resulted in the deaths of people of color at the hands of police officers. While the impact of news and general social media accounts are not a part of this study, the findings in this research indicate that students may have been affected by the heightened awareness of racial concerns. Students who disputed the importance of other Woke religion aspects, such as abortion and LGBTQ+ rights, were less resolved in their responses to CRT and BLM. It is also noted in the data that of all topics presented in the study, pastors and youth pastors more frequently speak about BLM and the Green Agenda. This implies that within the Baptist and non-denominational churches reflected in this study, pastors and youth pastors may be wavering from certain biblical

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[4] Scott David Allen, *Why Social Justice is Not Biblical Justice: An Urgent Appeal to Fellow Christians in a Time of Social Crisis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Credo House Publishers, 2020), 140.

truths in their discussion of these topics as well. Regardless of what the world is preaching about social justice, Strachan reminds that the church needs to remain focused on biblical justice and biblical truth. He states:

> In Eden, there is just one human race, not many races. Our skin color is part of the beautiful diversity of the God-made world, as are numerous elements of our person. We are not the same person, but we are the same race. Humanity as made by God is not divided into many species but is one. Many different worldviews and religions tell us differently, but biblical Christianity begins in a place of absolute human unity…Every person is a God-made being. Every person has a God-given dignity and worth. Every person *is* the image of God [emphasis original]…every person is a fully human being, and no one can erase this reality. No one can alter it. We who know Scripture know this truth.[5]

With the ongoing news and social media coverage affirming CRT and BLM, it is vital that church leaders provide an alternative viewpoint that teaches young adults and all members of their congregations the truth of diversity and of justice. Allen asserts, "The social justice worldview has no place for a final judgment. What is deemed 'evil' must be rooted out here and now, by fallible men and women, using any means necessary."[6] Pastors and youth pastors must continue to remind young adults that God alone will administer the final judgment for injustice.

Green Environment

Another social justice topic that exhibits deviation in survey results is that of the green environment. This topic is also currently receiving elevated status in news and social media. For Christians, caring for the environment is a task assigned at Creation (Gen. 1:26–68). It would be to the detriment of mankind to disregard God's command and cause destruction to the planet that He created. As with the topics of BLM and CRT, caring for the earth is a social justice issue that

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[5] Strachan, *Christianity and Wokeness,* 136.

[6] Allen, *Why Social Justice is Not Biblical Justice,* 95.

can be confusing for all Christians, especially young adults. D.W. Holdridge addresses concerns over global warming (GW) and climate change (CC) in his text, *Climate Change and the Bible.* Holdridge asserts, "CC is alleged to be responsible for all kinds of severe shifts in the weather, driven by a warming planet. Yet today's forecast is but a small snapshot of climatic patterns occurring over a significant portion of time. When viewed across centuries and millennia, atmospheric conditions tend to run in cycles, as do other forces of nature."[7] Holdridge goes on to state, "Since the Church is increasingly wrestling with a proper response to Climate Change, it is essential for her members to get a clearer picture of the scientific, historical, and biblical truths behind this issue so the Bride of Christ can react appropriately to the arguments being advanced by politicians, scientists, and theologians alike."[8] Since participant responses in the survey exhibit a lack of certainty about positions on climate, the findings indicate that the church needs to focus on providing messages on climate. Holdridge exhorts the church to "Let people know that the earth has gone through many cycles of climate change throughout its history and that God is in control of the future climate as He has been in the past…Humanity cannot save the planet, neither can mankind destroy it."[9]

<center>Implications</center>

The religious scholars cited in the Literature Review suggest the nation is settling into a pattern of acceptance of personal choice regardless of the outcome and the inability to clearly declare behaviors as right or wrong. This condition of apathy is seen in government, business, education, and the church. For some, apathy may also be coupled with a fear of potential

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[7] D. W. Holdridge, *Climate Change and the Bible* (Meadville, PA: Christian Faith Publishing, 2019), 7-8.

[8] Holdridge, *Climate Change,* 8.

[9] Holdridge, *Climate Change,* 330.

retaliation from those clamoring for the acceptance of Woke ideology. The unwillingness of

academic institutions to participate in this study is consistent with this condition. R. Albert

Mohler provides thoughtful insight into this discussion:

> We must defend the right to believe in enough theology to get us into trouble with anyone, anywhere, in a secular age. We must defend the right of Christians, along with all other believers, to be faithful in the public square as well as in the privacy of our own homes, hearts, and churches. We must defend the right to teach our children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. We must defend the rights of Christian schools to be Christian–and to order our institutions around the Word of God without fearing the crushing power of the state. We must defend the right of generations of those yet unborn, to know the liberties we have known and now defend.[10]

This study presents secular topics that have received notoriety in the nation's schools, churches,

and communities, with a specified application to college-age Christian students. Scholars in the

worship field and those called to serve in worship ministry must be aware of the impacts of

church messaging and pastoral teaching on secular topics. Church leaders must also be willing to

stand firm on biblical truth. Erwin Lutzer warns, "It's vital for us to understand that behind the

headlines is a raging spiritual battle that can be confronted only by prayer and repentance

followed by action in keeping with repentance. Only then can we hope to be a powerful voice in

this nation."[11]

Limitations

As with all studies, this research has some limitations. While the goal of this study was to

analyze a higher number of responses from Christian college students, participation in this study

is limited by the unwillingness of Christian universities to deploy the online survey. Fifteen

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[10] R. Albert Mohler Jr., *The Gathering Storm: Secularism, Culture, and the Church* (Nashville, TN: Nelson Books, 2020), 187.

[11] Erwin W. Lutzer, *We Will Not Be Silenced: Responding Courageously to Our Culture's Assault on Christianity* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2020)*,* 37.

universities were contacted by the researcher requesting permission for student participation.

Only two universities agreed to participate, limiting the number of responses to the online

survey. In addition, focus group participation is limited to students at Liberty University. The

researcher requested the assistance of a local secular university to publicize the option of

participating in the focus group; however, this request was denied. Today's climate has caused

fear among Christians, which may be a contributing factor to the lack of participation by

universities. As Lutzer explains, "To merely question the viewpoints of secular left radicals on

social issues is denounced as hateful, bigoted, and racist. We who are Christians are told that if

we want to be known as good citizens, we should keep our antiquated views to ourselves. We are

made to feel embarrassed…We are shamed into silence."[12] Many universities who were invited

to participate in this study did not offer a reason for their decline, while others simply stated, "it

is not a good fit for our university." As this study brings to light the potential impact of

messaging on the Woke agenda, it is possible that fear of retribution may be affecting decisions

made by universities, especially given the May 6, 2020, Title IX regulation revisions that

determine school funding.[13]

Assumptions testing indicates there are some instances where the causal comparative of

outliers between groups is untenable and therefore violates the assumption of outliers. Similarly,

the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test finds the asymptotic assumption of normality is violated and

untenable. A possible response to these violations is to standardize the data via a log

transformation or to shift to non-parametric analysis; however, since the number of responses to

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[12] Lutzer, *We Will Not Be Silenced*, 20.

[13] United States Department of Justice, *Title IX Legal Manual*, accessed March 2, 2023, https://www.justice.gov/crt/title-ix. Note: Congress enacted Title IX with two principal objectives in mind: to avoid the use of federal resources to support discriminatory practices in education programs, and to provide individual citizens effective protection against those practices.

this survey is in the low 200s, this process would not result in a significant change in results and parametric analysis is preferred in this application.

A final limitation is noted in the lack of denominations reflected among the respondents in this study. As the two participating universities are private Baptist institutions, the number of students who align with the Baptist church significantly outweighs those of other stated denominations. This is somewhat addressed by a large number of students who claim to attend churches that are non-denominational. Still, the lack of significant data gathered from students in other mainline denominations such, as Methodist, Presbyterian, and Lutheran, restricts the ability of the researcher to assess differences between denominations that have moved toward acceptance and integration of Woke values.

Recommendations for Further Research

The options for further research on the topic of Woke religion are plentiful. Studies from the perspective of specific mainline denominations other than Baptist would provide insight into the direct impact of Woke ideology on their college-aged population. Based on the rejection from Christian universities to allow participation in this study, this may be best achieved from research that is sought directly from churches rather than educational institutions. Churches may also be more receptive to participation if the researcher closely aligns with their stance on Woke ideology. It is also recommend that the study be conducted with an explanatory sequential mixed methods design to develop the survey based on data collected from the focus group.

The impact of student upbringing, family regularity of reading and discussing the Bible, and family values could provide greater clarity on how secular topics are viewed. A majority of responses from students participating in the focus group for this study indicate a strong connection to the beliefs and values on which the students were raised. Thus, upbringing seems

to influence the decisions of many Christian students. The topics of consistent personal Bible reading and Bible study are not addressed as part of this study. Research into the personal and family habits of Bible reading and discussion could evoke responses from participant interviews that exhibit a clear connection between their faith and their standing on Woke topics. Further, as students move away from their homes and churches to attend college, a more detailed study regarding the continuance of family-based religious practices, values, and belief systems among college students could add perspective.

Geographical location is an additional variable that surfaced as a result of this study. Students who participated in the focus group made regular comments about living in the *South* or the *Midwest,* where conservative values are more prominent. Additional research into the communities in which students live may offer unique insights into the topic of acceptance or resistance to the various aspects of Woke religion. A comparative analysis of Christian students that live and attend worship in communities that lean toward opposite ends of the political spectrum would add depth to the conversation on Woke religion and the church.

The influence of peers and social media on individuals cannot be denied. Students in the focus group were asked to indicate how they processed messages on Woke topics. Several indicate they relied on their parents; however, other students share that they talked with friends or conducted searches on the internet to find answers. Another aspect to be considered is the concept of social shaming and peer pressure, which may influence responses. A study of each of these external variables could be of great benefit in identifying how students are influenced on secular issues.

Finally, a study on the school systems in which students received their elementary and high school education could provide further insight into this topic. It is reasonable to assume that

students may be influenced by those who are responsible for their education. Thus, a study of Woke topics that compares responses of college-aged students who are home-schooled or who were educated in a Christian school may result in responses that are completely different from students who were enrolled in a public school.

Concluding Remarks

The reluctance of universities to participate in this study is disappointing, as the lack of student representation across multiple denominations limited the results that were gathered. This disinclination may be explained by concerns over government funding at universities. According to *USA Facts*, "Colleges and universities received $1.068 trillion in revenue from federal and non-federal funding sources in 2018."[14] With so many public and private institutions relying on federal funding to survive, the lack of broader participation could indicate concern over the emphasis on the preservation of this aid and adherence to federal regulations such as Title IX. Christian universities are being forced into a decision to align with nondiscrimination policies or lose federal dollars. Lutzer warns, "Once a school's administration has started down this road, there is no stopping until the full spectrum of the LGBTQ agenda is dutifully embraced."[15] The hesitancy of universities to participate in this academic study is reflective of this shift toward obedience to secular agendas. While participation by multiple denominations was limited, the data collected in this research has resulted in an important and unique contribution to the study of church teachings regarding secular topics and the effects of these teachings on college-aged students. The findings indicate that regular worship attendance has a direct impact on the

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[14] "What do Universities Do with the Billions They Receive from the Government," *USA Facts* November 3, 2021, https://usafacts.org/articles/what-do-universities-do-with-the-billions-they-receive-from-the-government/.

[15] Lutzer, *We Will Not Be Silenced,* 162.

response of young adults to secular topics, and the teachings set forth by denominations, churches, and pastors. These factors are connected to the beliefs and values reported by the students who participated in the study. Much work is yet to be done in this field of study, but it will require the courage of Christian universities and churches to agree to participate in this valuable research.

Appendix A: IRB Approval

IRB #: IRB-FY22-23-187
Title: "Woke Religion: Effects of Secularism and Progressive Politics on 21st Century Mainline Churches as demonstrated through the Worship and Witness of College-Age Students"
Creation Date: 8-12-2022
End Date:
Status: Approved
Principal Investigator: Brenda Widger
Review Board: Research Ethics Office
Sponsor:

Study History

Submission Type	Initial	Review Type	Exempt	Decision	Exempt

Key Study Contacts

Member	Brenda Widger	Role	Principal Investigator	Contact	
Member	Brenda Widger	Role	Primary Contact	Contact	
Member	Scott Connell	Role	Co-Principal Investigator	Contact	

Appendix B: IRB Stamped Consent - Online Survey

Consent

Title of the Project: "Woke Religion: Effects of Secularism and Progressive Politics on 21st Century Mainline Churches as demonstrated through the Worship and Witness of College-Age Students"
Principal Investigator: Brenda Widger, D.W.S. (candidate for Doctor of Philosophy of Christian Worship)

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be a college-aged student between the ages of 18 and 25 and active in your home church or while at college by attending worship or youth group activities at least twice per month. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to understand how Woke messaging within the church is impacting college-aged students in their worship practices and witness to others. Insights gained in this study will provide church leaders with information and best practices that may guide their decisions to include or exclude Woke ideology in sermons and publications.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:
1. Complete an online survey that contains a maximum of 18 questions (15-20 minutes total). The total number of questions is determined by the participant's responses in the survey.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include a better understanding of the impact of current Woke ideology with specific application to church and worship ministry.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.
- Participant responses will be anonymous.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.

Does the researcher have any conflicts of interest?

The researcher serves as the Online Chair in the School of Music and Adjunct Faculty Member at Liberty University. To limit potential or perceived conflicts the study will be anonymous, so the researcher will not know who participated. This disclosure is made so that you can decide if this relationship will affect your willingness to participate in this study. No action will be taken against an individual based on his or her decision to participate or not participate in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please exit the survey and close your internet browser. Your responses will not be recorded or included in the study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Dr. Brenda Widger. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Scott Connell, at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

Before agreeing to be part of the research, please be sure that you understand what the study is about. You can print a copy of the document for your records. If you have any questions about the study later, you can contact the researcher using the information provided above.

Do you wish to participate in this survey?

Yes
No*

*Answers of No will automatically end the survey.

Appendix C: IRB Stamped Consent – Focus Group

Consent

Title of the Project: "Woke Religion: Effects of Secularism and Progressive Politics on 21st Century Mainline Churches as demonstrated through the Worship and Witness of College-Age Students"
Principal Investigator: Brenda Widger, D.W.S. (candidate for Doctor of Philosophy of Christian Worship)

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be a college-aged student between the ages of 18 and 25 and active in your home church or while at college by attending worship or youth group activities at least twice per month. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to understand how Woke messaging within the church is impacting college-aged students in their worship practices and witness to others. Insights gained in this study will provide church leaders with information and best practices that may guide their decisions to include or exclude Woke ideology in sermons and publications.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:
1. Take part in an interview-based focus group with other students from Liberty University. The planned time commitment for this focus group is 60 minutes and will be audio-recorded to preserve an exact record of the conversations within the focus group discussion.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include a better understanding of the impact of current Woke ideology with specific application to church and worship ministry.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential using codes. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted.
- Focus groups will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

Does the researcher have any conflicts of interest?

The researcher serves as the Online Chair in the School of Music and Adjunct Faculty Member at Liberty University. The researcher does not teach any residential courses at Liberty University. As students who participate in the Focus Group are residential students, there is no direct teacher-student relationship. To limit potential or perceived conflicts, students choosing to participate in the study should consider their option of enrolling in an online course that the researcher may facilitate. This disclosure is made so that you can decide if this relationship will affect your willingness to participate in this study. No action will be taken against an individual based on his or her decision to participate or not participate in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you apart from focus group data will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Dr. Brenda Widger. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you are encouraged to contact her at ███████████████████
You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Scott Connell at
███████████████████

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.

_____
Printed Subject Name

_____
Signature & Date

Appendix D: Survey Questions

1. **What is your age?- (open blank for students to enter their age)**

   If student's age is outside the criteria, survey will end here.

2. **Are you a college student? (yes or no response)**

   If student is not a college student, the survey will end here, and student will not be allowed to participate in the focus group.

3. **On average, with what frequency did you attend worship at your home church?**
   - Fewer than twice per month
   - Twice per month
   - More than twice per month

   If student's attendance at worship is outside the criteria, survey will end here.

4. **What is the denomination of your home church?**

   Baptist

   Pentecostal

   Methodist

   Lutheran

   Presbyterian

   Catholic

   Non-denominational

   Other _____

5. **How likely are you to align your personal values and opinions with the official teachings of your denomination? (scale)**

Not at all likely   Somewhat likely   Likely

6. **How likely are you to align your personal values and opinions with the official teachings of your home church? (scale)**

Not at all likely   Somewhat likely   Likely

7. **Does your home church offer messages that affirm (speak positively) regarding any of the following social issues? (Check all that apply)**
   - Homosexuality
   - Gay Marriage
   - Transgenderism
   - Gender Fluidity
   - Critical Race Theory
   - Black Lives Matter Movement
   - Abortion Rights
   - Environment Issues (climate change, Green New Deal)
   - Political ideology (Conservatism, Liberalism, Socialism, Progressivism)

8. **With what frequency does your home pastor speak about social issues from the pulpit? (scale)**

Never   Seldom   Occasionally   Consistently

           (once or twice a year)   (6 or more times per year)   (12 or more times per year)

9. **Does your home church have an active youth group?**
   - Yes
   - No

10. **On average, with what frequency did you attend youth group events at your home church?**
    - Fewer than twice per month
    - Twice per month
    - More than twice per month

11. **Does your home church youth pastor offer affirming messages during youth events regarding any of the following social issues? (Check all that apply)**

- Homosexuality
- Gay Marriage
- Transgenderism
- Gender Fluidity
- Critical Race Theory
- Black Lives Matter Movement
- Abortion Rights
- Environment Issues
- Political ideology

12. With what frequency does your home youth pastor speak about social issues at youth events?(scale)

Never   Seldom   Occasionally   Consistently

          (once or twice a year)   (6 or more times per year)   (12 or more times per year)

13. How often does your church utilize official social media accounts to address any of the previously mentioned social issues? (scale)

Never   Seldom   Occasionally   Consistently

          (once or twice a year)   (6 or more times per year)   (12 or more times per year)

14. How often does your pastor use personal social media accounts to address any of the previously mentioned social issues? (scale)

Never   Seldom   Occasionally   Consistently

          (once or twice a year)   (6 or more times per year)   (12 or more times per year)

15. How often does your youth pastor use personal social media accounts to address any of the previously mentioned social issues? (scale)

Never   Seldom   Occasionally   Consistently

          (once or twice a year)   (6 or more times per year)   (12 or more times per year)

16. Of the social issues listed below, assign a "P" if you have a positive view of the issue (agreement) or an "N" if you have a negative view of the issue (disagreement)

- Homosexuality

- Gay Marriage
- Transgenderism
- Gender Fluidity
- Critical Race Theory
- Black Lives Matter Movement
- Abortion Rights
- Environment Issues (climate change, Green New Deal)
- Political ideology (Conservatism, Liberalism, Socialism, Progressivism)

	Affirm the importance of this issue in society - needs to be addressed to raise awareness and promote acceptance	Dispute the importance of this issue in society - believe that this issue is negatively affecting society	Unsure
Homosexuality			
Gay Marriage			
Transgenderism			
Gender Fluidity			
Critical Race Theory			
Black Lives Matter Movement			
Abortion Rights			

Environmental Issues (climate change; Green New Deal)			
Political Ideology (Conservatism, Liberalism, Socialism, Progressivism)			

17. In the next three questions you will select the top three social issues you believe are the most important and pressing in our country today
- Homosexuality
- Gay Marriage
- Transgenderism
- Gender Fluidity
- Critical Race Theory
- Black Lives Matter Movement
- Abortion Rights
- Environment Issues (climate change, Green New Deal)
- Political ideology (Conservatism, Liberalism, Socialism, Progressivism)

From the dropdown menu, select the social issue that you believe is the most important and pressing issue in our country today.

From the dropdown menu, select the social issue that you believe is the 2nd most important and pressing issue in our country today.

From the dropdown menu, select the social issue that you believe is the 3rd most important and

pressing issue in our country today.

Appendix E: Focus Group Questions

All participants will be required to answer the two screening questions indicating they meet the criteria for the study. A consent document will also be signed prior to the study.

Per the Sage Handbook of Qualitative Data Collection from Focus Groups, the approach I will be taking to the Focus Groups is on moderator driven, semi-structured format. The questions that are designed to promote conversation and feedback within the group. The goal is to provide 15-minute segments for each question, allowing those in the focus group to offer personal responses and experiences within their home churches. The moderator will strive to allow open-ended responses but will also guide to more targeted questions if the discussion is moving away from the topics of the questions.

Opening Remarks: In our focus group today, we will be discussing prevalent social issues and the ways that these issues are presented in the churches and youth gatherings you attended in your home church, or at a church you attend here in Lynchburg.
1. In your home churches did your pastors and/or youth leaders provide guidance on moral and ethical issues that are prominent in today's culture?
    a. Addressed in sermons/lessons?
    b. Addressed in private blogs or other personal social media?
    c. Addressed through church literature or websites?
2. When messages on these topics were discussed or presented in literature or social media, did you generally accept the messages as presented, discuss it with family or friends, or attempt to confirm the messages in Scripture?
    a. Do you currently attend a church that maintains a similar message as your home church? Why or why not?
3. Of the topics named in our discussion, which issue do you believe is the most prevalent, and why?
4. How do the messages that you received from the pastor and/or youth leader in your church impact the way that you view these social issues personally, and in conversations with your peers?

Appendix F: *Letter from a Birmingham Jail* by Martin Luther King, Jr.

16 April 1963
My Dear Fellow Clergymen:
While confined here in the Birmingham city jail, I came across your recent statement calling my present activities "unwise and untimely." Seldom do I pause to answer criticism of my work and ideas. If I sought to answer all the criticisms that cross my desk, my secretaries would have little time for anything other than such correspondence in the course of the day, and I would have no time for constructive work. But since I feel that you are men of genuine good will and that your criticisms are sincerely set forth, I want to try to answer your statement in what I hope will be patient and reasonable terms.

I think I should indicate why I am here in Birmingham, since you have been influenced by the view which argues against "outsiders coming in." I have the honor of serving as president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, an organization operating in every southern state, with headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia. We have some eighty five affiliated organizations across the South, and one of them is the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights. Frequently we share staff, educational and financial resources with our affiliates. Several months ago the affiliate here in Birmingham asked us to be on call to engage in a nonviolent direct action program if such were deemed necessary. We readily consented, and when the hour came we lived up to our promise. So I, along with several members of my staff, am here because I was invited here. I am here because I have organizational ties here.

But more basically, I am in Birmingham because injustice is here. Just as the prophets of the eighth century B.C. left their villages and carried their "thus saith the Lord" far beyond the boundaries of their home towns, and just as the Apostle Paul left his village of Tarsus and carried the gospel of Jesus Christ to the far corners of the Greco Roman world, so am I compelled to carry the gospel of freedom beyond my own home town. Like Paul, I must constantly respond to the Macedonian call for aid.

Moreover, I am cognizant of the interrelatedness of all communities and states. I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. Never again can we afford to live with the narrow, provincial "outside agitator" idea. Anyone who lives inside the United States can never be considered an outsider anywhere within its bounds.

You deplore the demonstrations taking place in Birmingham. But your statement, I am sorry to say, fails to express a similar concern for the conditions that brought about the demonstrations. I am sure that none of you would want to rest content with the superficial kind of social analysis that deals merely with effects and does not grapple with underlying causes. It is unfortunate that demonstrations are taking place in Birmingham, but it is even more unfortunate that the city's white power structure left the Negro community with no alternative.

In any nonviolent campaign there are four basic steps: collection of the facts to determine whether injustices exist; negotiation; self purification; and direct action. We have gone through all these steps in Birmingham. There can be no gainsaying the fact that racial injustice engulfs this community. Birmingham is probably the most thoroughly segregated city in the United States. Its ugly record of brutality is widely known. Negroes have experienced grossly unjust treatment in the courts. There have been more unsolved bombings of Negro homes and churches in Birmingham than in any other city in the nation. These are the hard, brutal facts of the case. On the basis of these conditions, Negro leaders sought to negotiate with the city fathers. But the latter consistently refused to engage in good faith negotiation.

Then, last September, came the opportunity to talk with leaders of Birmingham's economic community. In the course of the negotiations, certain promises were made by the merchants--for example, to remove the stores' humiliating racial signs. On the basis of these promises, the Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth and the leaders of the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights agreed to a moratorium on all demonstrations. As the weeks and months went by, we realized that we were the victims of a broken promise. A few signs, briefly removed, returned; the others remained. As in so many past experiences, our hopes had been blasted, and the shadow of deep disappointment settled upon us. We had no alternative except to prepare for direct action, whereby we would present our very bodies as a means of laying our case before the conscience of the local and the national community. Mindful of the difficulties involved, we decided to undertake a process of self purification. We began a series of workshops on nonviolence, and we repeatedly asked ourselves: "Are you able to accept blows without retaliating?" "Are you able to endure the ordeal of jail?" We decided to schedule our direct action program for the Easter season, realizing that except for Christmas, this is the main shopping period of the year. Knowing that a strong economic-withdrawal program would be the by product of direct action, we felt that this would be the best time to bring pressure to bear on the merchants for the needed change.

Then it occurred to us that Birmingham's mayoral election was coming up in March, and we speedily decided to postpone action until after election day. When we discovered that the Commissioner of Public Safety, Eugene "Bull" Connor, had piled up enough votes to be in the run off, we decided again to postpone action until the day after the run off so that the demonstrations could not be used to cloud the issues. Like many others, we waited to see Mr. Connor defeated, and to this end we endured postponement after postponement. Having aided in this community need, we felt that our direct action program could be delayed no longer.

You may well ask: "Why direct action? Why sit ins, marches and so forth? Isn't negotiation a better path?" You are quite right in calling for negotiation. Indeed, this is the very purpose of direct action. Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored. My citing the creation of tension as part of the work of the nonviolent resister may sound rather shocking. But I must confess that I am not afraid of the word "tension." I have earnestly opposed violent tension, but there is a type of constructive, nonviolent tension which is necessary for growth. Just as Socrates felt that it was necessary to create a tension in the mind so that individuals could rise from the bondage of myths and half truths to the unfettered realm of creative analysis and objective appraisal, so must

we see the need for nonviolent gadflies to create the kind of tension in society that will help men rise from the dark depths of prejudice and racism to the majestic heights of understanding and brotherhood. The purpose of our direct action program is to create a situation so crisis packed that it will inevitably open the door to negotiation. I therefore concur with you in your call for negotiation. Too long has our beloved Southland been bogged down in a tragic effort to live in monologue rather than dialogue.

One of the basic points in your statement is that the action that I and my associates have taken in Birmingham is untimely. Some have asked: "Why didn't you give the new city administration time to act?" The only answer that I can give to this query is that the new Birmingham administration must be prodded about as much as the outgoing one, before it will act. We are sadly mistaken if we feel that the election of Albert Boutwell as mayor will bring the millennium to Birmingham. While Mr. Boutwell is a much more gentle person than Mr. Connor, they are both segregationists, dedicated to maintenance of the status quo. I have hope that Mr. Boutwell will be reasonable enough to see the futility of massive resistance to desegregation. But he will not see this without pressure from devotees of civil rights. My friends, I must say to you that we have not made a single gain in civil rights without determined legal and nonviolent pressure. Lamentably, it is an historical fact that privileged groups seldom give up their privileges voluntarily. Individuals may see the moral light and voluntarily give up their unjust posture; but, as Reinhold Niebuhr has reminded us, groups tend to be more immoral than individuals.

We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed. Frankly, I have yet to engage in a direct action campaign that was "well timed" in the view of those who have not suffered unduly from the disease of segregation. For years now I have heard the word "Wait!" It rings in the ear of every Negro with piercing familiarity. This "Wait" has almost always meant "Never." We must come to see, with one of our distinguished jurists, that "justice too long delayed is justice denied."

We have waited for more than 340 years for our constitutional and God given rights. The nations of Asia and Africa are moving with jetlike speed toward gaining political independence, but we still creep at horse and buggy pace toward gaining a cup of coffee at a lunch counter. Perhaps it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging darts of segregation to say, "Wait." But when you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at will and drown your sisters and brothers at whim; when you have seen hate filled policemen curse, kick and even kill your black brothers and sisters; when you see the vast majority of your twenty million Negro brothers smothering in an airtight cage of poverty in the midst of an affluent society; when you suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech stammering as you seek to explain to your six year old daughter why she can't go to the public amusement park that has just been advertised on television, and see tears welling up in her eyes when she is told that Funtown is closed to colored children, and see ominous clouds of inferiority beginning to form in her little mental sky, and see her beginning to distort her personality by developing an unconscious bitterness toward white people; when you have to concoct an answer for a five year old son who is asking: "Daddy, why do white people treat colored people so mean?"; when you take a cross county drive and find it necessary to sleep night after night in the uncomfortable corners of your automobile because no motel will accept you; when you are humiliated day in and day out by nagging signs reading "white" and "colored"; when your first name becomes "nigger," your middle name becomes

"boy" (however old you are) and your last name becomes "John," and your wife and mother are never given the respected title "Mrs."; when you are harried by day and haunted by night by the fact that you are a Negro, living constantly at tiptoe stance, never quite knowing what to expect next, and are plagued with inner fears and outer resentments; when you are forever fighting a degenerating sense of "nobodiness"--then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait. There comes a time when the cup of endurance runs over, and men are no longer willing to be plunged into the abyss of despair. I hope, sirs, you can understand our legitimate and unavoidable impatience. You express a great deal of anxiety over our willingness to break laws. This is certainly a legitimate concern. Since we so diligently urge people to obey the Supreme Court's decision of 1954 outlawing segregation in the public schools, at first glance it may seem rather paradoxical for us consciously to break laws. One may well ask: "How can you advocate breaking some laws and obeying others?" The answer lies in the fact that there are two types of laws: just and unjust. I would be the first to advocate obeying just laws. One has not only a legal but a moral responsibility to obey just laws. Conversely, one has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws. I would agree with St. Augustine that "an unjust law is no law at all."

Now, what is the difference between the two? How does one determine whether a law is just or unjust? A just law is a man made code that squares with the moral law or the law of God. An unjust law is a code that is out of harmony with the moral law. To put it in the terms of St. Thomas Aquinas: An unjust law is a human law that is not rooted in eternal law and natural law. Any law that uplifts human personality is just. Any law that degrades human personality is unjust. All segregation statutes are unjust because segregation distorts the soul and damages the personality. It gives the segregator a false sense of superiority and the segregated a false sense of inferiority. Segregation, to use the terminology of the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber, substitutes an "I it" relationship for an "I thou" relationship and ends up relegating persons to the status of things. Hence segregation is not only politically, economically and sociologically unsound, it is morally wrong and sinful. Paul Tillich has said that sin is separation. Is not segregation an existential expression of man's tragic separation, his awful estrangement, his terrible sinfulness? Thus it is that I can urge men to obey the 1954 decision of the Supreme Court, for it is morally right; and I can urge them to disobey segregation ordinances, for they are morally wrong.

Let us consider a more concrete example of just and unjust laws. An unjust law is a code that a numerical or power majority group compels a minority group to obey but does not make binding on itself. This is difference made legal. By the same token, a just law is a code that a majority compels a minority to follow and that it is willing to follow itself. This is sameness made legal. Let me give another explanation. A law is unjust if it is inflicted on a minority that, as a result of being denied the right to vote, had no part in enacting or devising the law. Who can say that the legislature of Alabama which set up that state's segregation laws was democratically elected? Throughout Alabama all sorts of devious methods are used to prevent Negroes from becoming registered voters, and there are some counties in which, even though Negroes constitute a majority of the population, not a single Negro is registered. Can any law enacted under such circumstances be considered democratically structured?

Sometimes a law is just on its face and unjust in its application. For instance, I have been arrested on a charge of parading without a permit. Now, there is nothing wrong in having an

ordinance which requires a permit for a parade. But such an ordinance becomes unjust when it is used to maintain segregation and to deny citizens the First-Amendment privilege of peaceful assembly and protest.

I hope you are able to see the distinction I am trying to point out. In no sense do I advocate evading or defying the law, as would the rabid segregationist. That would lead to anarchy. One who breaks an unjust law must do so openly, lovingly, and with a willingness to accept the penalty. I submit that an individual who breaks a law that conscience tells him is unjust, and who willingly accepts the penalty of imprisonment in order to arouse the conscience of the community over its injustice, is in reality expressing the highest respect for law.

Of course, there is nothing new about this kind of civil disobedience. It was evidenced sublimely in the refusal of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego to obey the laws of Nebuchadnezzar, on the ground that a higher moral law was at stake. It was practiced superbly by the early Christians, who were willing to face hungry lions and the excruciating pain of chopping blocks rather than submit to certain unjust laws of the Roman Empire. To a degree, academic freedom is a reality today because Socrates practiced civil disobedience. In our own nation, the Boston Tea Party represented a massive act of civil disobedience.

We should never forget that everything Adolf Hitler did in Germany was "legal" and everything the Hungarian freedom fighters did in Hungary was "illegal." It was "illegal" to aid and comfort a Jew in Hitler's Germany. Even so, I am sure that, had I lived in Germany at the time, I would have aided and comforted my Jewish brothers. If today I lived in a Communist country where certain principles dear to the Christian faith are suppressed, I would openly advocate disobeying that country's antireligious laws.

I must make two honest confessions to you, my Christian and Jewish brothers. First, I must confess that over the past few years I have been gravely disappointed with the white moderate. I have almost reached the regrettable conclusion that the Negro's great stumbling block in his stride toward freedom is not the White Citizen's Counciler or the Ku Klux Klanner, but the white moderate, who is more devoted to "order" than to justice; who prefers a negative peace which is the absence of tension to a positive peace which is the presence of justice; who constantly says: "I agree with you in the goal you seek, but I cannot agree with your methods of direct action"; who paternalistically believes he can set the timetable for another man's freedom; who lives by a mythical concept of time and who constantly advises the Negro to wait for a "more convenient season." Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection.

I had hoped that the white moderate would understand that law and order exist for the purpose of establishing justice and that when they fail in this purpose they become the dangerously structured dams that block the flow of social progress. I had hoped that the white moderate would understand that the present tension in the South is a necessary phase of the transition from an obnoxious negative peace, in which the Negro passively accepted his unjust plight, to a substantive and positive peace, in which all men will respect the dignity and worth of human personality. Actually, we who engage in nonviolent direct action are not the creators of tension.

We merely bring to the surface the hidden tension that is already alive. We bring it out in the open, where it can be seen and dealt with. Like a boil that can never be cured so long as it is covered up but must be opened with all its ugliness to the natural medicines of air and light, injustice must be exposed, with all the tension its exposure creates, to the light of human conscience and the air of national opinion before it can be cured.

In your statement you assert that our actions, even though peaceful, must be condemned because they precipitate violence. But is this a logical assertion? Isn't this like condemning a robbed man because his possession of money precipitated the evil act of robbery? Isn't this like condemning Socrates because his unswerving commitment to truth and his philosophical inquiries precipitated the act by the misguided populace in which they made him drink hemlock? Isn't this like condemning Jesus because his unique God consciousness and never ceasing devotion to God's will precipitated the evil act of crucifixion? We must come to see that, as the federal courts have consistently affirmed, it is wrong to urge an individual to cease his efforts to gain his basic constitutional rights because the quest may precipitate violence. Society must protect the robbed and punish the robber. I had also hoped that the white moderate would reject the myth concerning time in relation to the struggle for freedom. I have just received a letter from a white brother in Texas. He writes: "All Christians know that the colored people will receive equal rights eventually, but it is possible that you are in too great a religious hurry. It has taken Christianity almost two thousand years to accomplish what it has. The teachings of Christ take time to come to earth." Such an attitude stems from a tragic misconception of time, from the strangely irrational notion that there is something in the very flow of time that will inevitably cure all ills. Actually, time itself is neutral; it can be used either destructively or constructively. More and more I feel that the people of ill will have used time much more effectively than have the people of good will. We will have to repent in this generation not merely for the hateful words and actions of the bad people but for the appalling silence of the good people. Human progress never rolls in on wheels of inevitability; it comes through the tireless efforts of men willing to be co workers with God, and without this hard work, time itself becomes an ally of the forces of social stagnation. We must use time creatively, in the knowledge that the time is always ripe to do right. Now is the time to make real the promise of democracy and transform our pending national elegy into a creative psalm of brotherhood. Now is the time to lift our national policy from the quicksand of racial injustice to the solid rock of human dignity.

You speak of our activity in Birmingham as extreme. At first I was rather disappointed that fellow clergymen would see my nonviolent efforts as those of an extremist. I began thinking about the fact that I stand in the middle of two opposing forces in the Negro community. One is a force of complacency, made up in part of Negroes who, as a result of long years of oppression, are so drained of self respect and a sense of "somebodiness" that they have adjusted to segregation; and in part of a few middle-class Negroes who, because of a degree of academic and economic security and because in some ways they profit by segregation, have become insensitive to the problems of the masses. The other force is one of bitterness and hatred, and it comes perilously close to advocating violence. It is expressed in the various black nationalist groups that are springing up across the nation, the largest and best known being Elijah Muhammad's Muslim movement. Nourished by the Negro's frustration over the continued existence of racial discrimination, this movement is made up of people who have lost faith in America, who have

absolutely repudiated Christianity, and who have concluded that the white man is an incorrigible "devil."

I have tried to stand between these two forces, saying that we need emulate neither the "do nothingism" of the complacent nor the hatred and despair of the black nationalist. For there is the more excellent way of love and nonviolent protest. I am grateful to God that, through the influence of the Negro church, the way of nonviolence became an integral part of our struggle. If this philosophy had not emerged, by now many streets of the South would, I am convinced, be flowing with blood. And I am further convinced that if our white brothers dismiss as "rabble rousers" and "outside agitators" those of us who employ nonviolent direct action, and if they refuse to support our nonviolent efforts, millions of Negroes will, out of frustration and despair, seek solace and security in black nationalist ideologies--a development that would inevitably lead to a frightening racial nightmare.

Oppressed people cannot remain oppressed forever. The yearning for freedom eventually manifests itself, and that is what has happened to the American Negro. Something within has reminded him of his birthright of freedom, and something without has reminded him that it can be gained. Consciously or unconsciously, he has been caught up by the Zeitgeist, and with his black brothers of Africa and his brown and yellow brothers of Asia, South America and the Caribbean, the United States Negro is moving with a sense of great urgency toward the promised land of racial justice. If one recognizes this vital urge that has engulfed the Negro community, one should readily understand why public demonstrations are taking place. The Negro has many pent up resentments and latent frustrations, and he must release them. So let him march; let him make prayer pilgrimages to the city hall; let him go on freedom rides -and try to understand why he must do so. If his repressed emotions are not released in nonviolent ways, they will seek expression through violence; this is not a threat but a fact of history. So I have not said to my people: "Get rid of your discontent." Rather, I have tried to say that this normal and healthy discontent can be channeled into the creative outlet of nonviolent direct action. And now this approach is being termed extremist. But though I was initially disappointed at being categorized as an extremist, as I continued to think about the matter I gradually gained a measure of satisfaction from the label. Was not Jesus an extremist for love: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you." Was not Amos an extremist for justice: "Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever flowing stream." Was not Paul an extremist for the Christian gospel: "I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." Was not Martin Luther an extremist: "Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise, so help me God." And John Bunyan: "I will stay in jail to the end of my days before I make a butchery of my conscience." And Abraham Lincoln: "This nation cannot survive half slave and half free." And Thomas Jefferson: "We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal . . ." So the question is not whether we will be extremists, but what kind of extremists we will be. Will we be extremists for hate or for love? Will we be extremists for the preservation of injustice or for the extension of justice? In that dramatic scene on Calvary's hill three men were crucified. We must never forget that all three were crucified for the same crime--the crime of extremism. Two were extremists for immorality, and thus fell below their environment. The other, Jesus Christ, was an extremist for love, truth and goodness, and thereby rose above his environment. Perhaps the South, the nation and the world are in dire need of creative extremists.

I had hoped that the white moderate would see this need. Perhaps I was too optimistic; perhaps I expected too much. I suppose I should have realized that few members of the oppressor race can understand the deep groans and passionate yearnings of the oppressed race, and still fewer have the vision to see that injustice must be rooted out by strong, persistent and determined action. I am thankful, however, that some of our white brothers in the South have grasped the meaning of this social revolution and committed themselves to it. They are still all too few in quantity, but they are big in quality. Some -such as Ralph McGill, Lillian Smith, Harry Golden, James McBride Dabbs, Ann Braden and Sarah Patton Boyle--have written about our struggle in eloquent and prophetic terms. Others have marched with us down nameless streets of the South. They have languished in filthy, roach infested jails, suffering the abuse and brutality of policemen who view them as "dirty nigger-lovers." Unlike so many of their moderate brothers and sisters, they have recognized the urgency of the moment and sensed the need for powerful "action" antidotes to combat the disease of segregation. Let me take note of my other major disappointment. I have been so greatly disappointed with the white church and its leadership. Of course, there are some notable exceptions. I am not unmindful of the fact that each of you has taken some significant stands on this issue. I commend you, Reverend Stallings, for your Christian stand on this past Sunday, in welcoming Negroes to your worship service on a nonsegregated basis. I commend the Catholic leaders of this state for integrating Spring Hill College several years ago.

But despite these notable exceptions, I must honestly reiterate that I have been disappointed with the church. I do not say this as one of those negative critics who can always find something wrong with the church. I say this as a minister of the gospel, who loves the church; who was nurtured in its bosom; who has been sustained by its spiritual blessings and who will remain true to it as long as the cord of life shall lengthen.

When I was suddenly catapulted into the leadership of the bus protest in Montgomery, Alabama, a few years ago, I felt we would be supported by the white church. I felt that the white ministers, priests and rabbis of the South would be among our strongest allies. Instead, some have been outright opponents, refusing to understand the freedom movement and misrepresenting its leaders; all too many others have been more cautious than courageous and have remained silent behind the anesthetizing security of stained glass windows.

In spite of my shattered dreams, I came to Birmingham with the hope that the white religious leadership of this community would see the justice of our cause and, with deep moral concern, would serve as the channel through which our just grievances could reach the power structure. I had hoped that each of you would understand. But again I have been disappointed.

I have heard numerous southern religious leaders admonish their worshipers to comply with a desegregation decision because it is the law, but I have longed to hear white ministers declare: "Follow this decree because integration is morally right and because the Negro is your brother." In the midst of blatant injustices inflicted upon the Negro, I have watched white churchmen stand on the sideline and mouth pious irrelevancies and sanctimonious trivialities. In the midst of a mighty struggle to rid our nation of racial and economic injustice, I have heard many ministers say: "Those are social issues, with which the gospel has no real concern." And I have watched

many churches commit themselves to a completely other worldly religion which makes a strange, un-Biblical distinction between body and soul, between the sacred and the secular.

I have traveled the length and breadth of Alabama, Mississippi and all the other southern states. On sweltering summer days and crisp autumn mornings I have looked at the South's beautiful churches with their lofty spires pointing heavenward. I have beheld the impressive outlines of her massive religious education buildings. Over and over I have found myself asking: "What kind of people worship here? Who is their God? Where were their voices when the lips of Governor Barnett dripped with words of interposition and nullification? Where were they when Governor Wallace gave a clarion call for defiance and hatred? Where were their voices of support when bruised and weary Negro men and women decided to rise from the dark dungeons of complacency to the bright hills of creative protest?"

Yes, these questions are still in my mind. In deep disappointment I have wept over the laxity of the church. But be assured that my tears have been tears of love. There can be no deep disappointment where there is not deep love. Yes, I love the church. How could I do otherwise? I am in the rather unique position of being the son, the grandson and the great grandson of preachers. Yes, I see the church as the body of Christ. But, oh! How we have blemished and scarred that body through social neglect and through fear of being nonconformists.

There was a time when the church was very powerful--in the time when the early Christians rejoiced at being deemed worthy to suffer for what they believed. In those days the church was not merely a thermometer that recorded the ideas and principles of popular opinion; it was a thermostat that transformed the mores of society. Whenever the early Christians entered a town, the people in power became disturbed and immediately sought to convict the Christians for being "disturbers of the peace" and "outside agitators.'" But the Christians pressed on, in the conviction that they were "a colony of heaven," called to obey God rather than man. Small in number, they were big in commitment. They were too God-intoxicated to be "astronomically intimidated." By their effort and example they brought an end to such ancient evils as infanticide and gladiatorial contests. Things are different now. So often the contemporary church is a weak, ineffectual voice with an uncertain sound. So often it is an archdefender of the status quo. Far from being disturbed by the presence of the church, the power structure of the average community is consoled by the church's silent--and often even vocal--sanction of things as they are.

But the judgment of God is upon the church as never before. If today's church does not recapture the sacrificial spirit of the early church, it will lose its authenticity, forfeit the loyalty of millions, and be dismissed as an irrelevant social club with no meaning for the twentieth century. Every day I meet young people whose disappointment with the church has turned into outright disgust.

Perhaps I have once again been too optimistic. Is organized religion too inextricably bound to the status quo to save our nation and the world? Perhaps I must turn my faith to the inner spiritual church, the church within the church, as the true ekklesia and the hope of the world. But again I am thankful to God that some noble souls from the ranks of organized religion have broken loose from the paralyzing chains of conformity and joined us as active partners in the struggle for freedom. They have left their secure congregations and walked the streets of Albany, Georgia, with us. They have gone down the highways of the South on tortuous rides for freedom. Yes,

they have gone to jail with us. Some have been dismissed from their churches, have lost the support of their bishops and fellow ministers. But they have acted in the faith that right defeated is stronger than evil triumphant. Their witness has been the spiritual salt that has preserved the true meaning of the gospel in these troubled times. They have carved a tunnel of hope through the dark mountain of disappointment. I hope the church as a whole will meet the challenge of this decisive hour. But even if the church does not come to the aid of justice, I have no despair about the future. I have no fear about the outcome of our struggle in Birmingham, even if our motives are at present misunderstood. We will reach the goal of freedom in Birmingham and all over the nation, because the goal of America is freedom. Abused and scorned though we may be, our destiny is tied up with America's destiny. Before the pilgrims landed at Plymouth, we were here. Before the pen of Jefferson etched the majestic words of the Declaration of Independence across the pages of history, we were here. For more than two centuries our forebears labored in this country without wages; they made cotton king; they built the homes of their masters while suffering gross injustice and shameful humiliation -and yet out of a bottomless vitality they continued to thrive and develop. If the inexpressible cruelties of slavery could not stop us, the opposition we now face will surely fail. We will win our freedom because the sacred heritage of our nation and the eternal will of God are embodied in our echoing demands. Before closing I feel impelled to mention one other point in your statement that has troubled me profoundly. You warmly commended the Birmingham police force for keeping "order" and "preventing violence." I doubt that you would have so warmly commended the police force if you had seen its dogs sinking their teeth into unarmed, nonviolent Negroes. I doubt that you would so quickly commend the policemen if you were to observe their ugly and inhumane treatment of Negroes here in the city jail; if you were to watch them push and curse old Negro women and young Negro girls; if you were to see them slap and kick old Negro men and young boys; if you were to observe them, as they did on two occasions, refuse to give us food because we wanted to sing our grace together. I cannot join you in your praise of the Birmingham police department.

It is true that the police have exercised a degree of discipline in handling the demonstrators. In this sense they have conducted themselves rather "nonviolently" in public. But for what purpose? To preserve the evil system of segregation. Over the past few years I have consistently preached that nonviolence demands that the means we use must be as pure as the ends we seek. I have tried to make clear that it is wrong to use immoral means to attain moral ends. But now I must affirm that it is just as wrong, or perhaps even more so, to use moral means to preserve immoral ends. Perhaps Mr. Connor and his policemen have been rather nonviolent in public, as was Chief Pritchett in Albany, Georgia, but they have used the moral means of nonviolence to maintain the immoral end of racial injustice. As T. S. Eliot has said: "The last temptation is the greatest treason: To do the right deed for the wrong reason."

I wish you had commended the Negro sit inners and demonstrators of Birmingham for their sublime courage, their willingness to suffer and their amazing discipline in the midst of great provocation. One day the South will recognize its real heroes. They will be the James Merediths, with the noble sense of purpose that enables them to face jeering and hostile mobs, and with the agonizing loneliness that characterizes the life of the pioneer. They will be old, oppressed, battered Negro women, symbolized in a seventy two year old woman in Montgomery, Alabama, who rose up with a sense of dignity and with her people decided not to ride segregated buses, and who responded with ungrammatical profundity to one who inquired about her weariness:

"My feets is tired, but my soul is at rest." They will be the young high school and college students, the young ministers of the gospel and a host of their elders, courageously and nonviolently sitting in at lunch counters and willingly going to jail for conscience' sake. One day the South will know that when these disinherited children of God sat down at lunch counters, they were in reality standing up for what is best in the American dream and for the most sacred values in our Judaeo Christian heritage, thereby bringing our nation back to those great wells of democracy which were dug deep by the founding fathers in their formulation of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence.

Never before have I written so long a letter. I'm afraid it is much too long to take your precious time. I can assure you that it would have been much shorter if I had been writing from a comfortable desk, but what else can one do when he is alone in a narrow jail cell, other than write long letters, think long thoughts and pray long prayers?

If I have said anything in this letter that overstates the truth and indicates an unreasonable impatience, I beg you to forgive me. If I have said anything that understates the truth and indicates my having a patience that allows me to settle for anything less than brotherhood, I beg God to forgive me.

I hope this letter finds you strong in the faith. I also hope that circumstances will soon make it possible for me to meet each of you, not as an integrationist or a civil-rights leader but as a fellow clergyman and a Christian brother. Let us all hope that the dark clouds of racial prejudice will soon pass away and the deep fog of misunderstanding will be lifted from our fear drenched communities, and in some not too distant tomorrow the radiant stars of love and brotherhood will shine over our great nation with all their scintillating beauty.

Yours for the cause of Peace and Brotherhood, Martin Luther King, Jr.
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