

1 **OVERTURE 18** from the Sessions of: (to OC)

2 Carriage Lane Presbyterian Church, Peachtree City, GA;
3 Covenant Presbyterian Church, Fayetteville, GA;
4 East Cobb Presbyterian Church, Marietta, GA;
5 Tucker Presbyterian Church, Tucker, GA.

6
7 “Affirm Christ-Centered Racial Reconciliation and Reject Secular Social Justice and
8 Critical Theory Ideology”
9

10 [Note: This overture was adopted by the Sessions of Carriage Lane Presbyterian Church,
11 Covenant Presbyterian Church, East Cobb Presbyterian Church, and Tucker
12 Presbyterian Church, submitted by them to Metro Atlanta Presbytery for its stated
13 meeting on January 24, 2023, and rejected by Metro Atlanta Presbytery at its stated
14 meeting on January 24, 2023.]
15

16 **Whereas**, the 44th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America (PCA)
17 recommitted itself “*to the gospel task of racial reconciliation, diligently seeking*
18 *effective courses of action to further that goal, with humility, sincerity and zeal, for*
19 *the glory of God and the furtherance of the Gospel*”¹ (italics added); and
20

21 **Whereas**, the 46th General Assembly of the PCA received the Report of the Ad Interim
22 Committee on Racial and Ethnic Reconciliation, which includes a Biblical analysis of
23 race², racism, and reconciliation through the redemptive historical lens of creation,
24 fall, and redemption, writing:
25

26 **Creation**

27 “Adam and Eve as the fountainhead of humanity represent all races in
28 themselves; while they are not identifiable by race or ethnicity, they contain
29 all races and ethnicities. And those races and ethnicities that spring from our
30 first parents bear God’s image. Hence, racism or ethnocentrism—which
31 presumes that one’s race or ethnicity is superior to another—is a denial that
32 all people have been created in the image of God.”³
33

34 **Fall**

35 “...Adam and Eve’s fall into sin happened. And that means that not only is
36 every race contained in Adam and so created in the image of God; every race
37 is contained in Adam and so experiences the effects of the fall (Gen 3). We

¹ “Minutes of the 44th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America,” June 21-23, 2016, https://www.pcahistory.org/pca/ga/44th_pcaga_2016.pdf (page 76, Overture 43 as amended).

² Note: the term “race” as used in the report “is not a scientific classification” but denotes the social use of the word which “not only pertains to the color of skin and other biological factors, but also may include the cultural factors, associations, and assumptions....” “Minutes of the 46th General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in America” June 12-15, 2018, https://www.pcahistory.org/pca/ga/46th_pcaga_2018.pdf, (page 597, “Report of the Ad Interim Committee on Racial and Ethnic Reconciliation”)

³ Ibid, 602.

1 all participate in the sin of our first parents; we all carry the contagion with
2 us. Hence, no race or ethnicity is more sinful than another.... We all have
3 sinned and fallen short of God's glory (Rom. 3:23)."⁴

4
5 **Redemption**

6 Through an exposition of Ephesians 2, the committee writes, "Regardless of
7 racial background reinforced by religious pre-commitments, now in Jesus we
8 have been reconciled to God 'in one body through the cross' (2:16). We have
9 a common access to the Father by the Spirit (2:18) and we are fellow citizens
10 of God's commonwealth (2:19). Whether Jew or Gentile, whether white or
11 black, Asian or Latino, or other races and ethnicities—through the cross of
12 Jesus, we have been and are being reconciled, displaying one new humanity
13 to the watching world"⁵; and

14
15 **Whereas**, the "racial and ethnic reconciliation" ad interim report includes practical guidance,
16 pastoral considerations⁶ and recommendations for racial reconciliation,⁷ which
17 encourage our elders, churches, and presbyteries to take steps toward cross cultural
18 shepherding and missions and Gospel-driven reconciliation within our churches and
19 in our neighborhoods; and

20
21 **Whereas**, a secular ideology involving race and racism is being advocated in public schools⁸
22 and corporations and is becoming commonplace in many churches today⁹. This
23 ideology—referred to at times as "antiracism," "woke" ideology, or critical social
24 justice (CSJ)—flows downstream from the social philosophy of critical theory, a neo-
25 Marxist (i.e., Gramscian) vision of domination, a movement in legal studies (and
26 beyond) known as critical race theory (CRT), and the postmodern prioritization of
27

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid, 606.

⁶ Ibid, 610-614.

⁷ Ibid, 619-625.

⁸ "Critical race theory has exploded from a narrow subspecialty of jurisprudence chiefly of interest to academic lawyers into a literature read in departments of education, cultural studies, English, sociology, comparative literature, political science, history, and anthropology around the country." Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (Dev: Darya Ganj, New Delhi, 2017), xvi; Lindsey M. Burke, Jonathan Butcher, and Jay P. Green, eds., *The Critical Classroom: How Critical Race Theory Undermines Academic Excellence and Individual Agency in Education* (Washington, DC: The Heritage Foundation, 2022). This volume includes a brief history of Critical Race Theory (CRT); how CRT is being propagated and applied in public schools in America today through school boards, curriculum and instruction; and the impact of CRT in the classroom and on children.

⁹ See, e.g., Timon Cline, "The 'Critical' Threat of Missions," Patheos.com, August 13, 2020, accessed January 10, 2023, <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/thecantankerouscalvinist/2020/08/13/the-critical-threat-of-missions/>; Neil Shenvi, "Critical Theory Within Evangelicalism," Shenviapogetics.com, accessed January 10, 2023, <https://shenviapogetics.com/critical-theory-within-evangelicalism/>.

1 subjectivity and power over objective reality and truth¹⁰. Among its many traits, this
2 layered ideology attempts to define and explain race, racism, and gender in a manner
3 contrary to a Biblical worldview;
4

5 **Therefore, be it resolved** that we affirm our desire to seek racial reconciliation in Christ that
6 conforms to the principles of creation, fall, and redemption as taught in the Scriptures
7 and affirmed in our confessional standards, and we recommit ourselves to the practical
8 and pastoral steps involved in biblically based racial reconciliation as recommended
9 by the PCA’s ad interim report on racial reconciliation.
10

11 Furthermore, we reject secular social justice and critical theory ideology, along with
12 its diverse strands, as antithetical to the Gospel and not the pattern that Scripture gives
13 us for addressing the sin of racism and pursuing a Biblical approach to racial
14 reconciliation. Specifically, we have in mind:
15

16 **1. Its Distinct Use of Classification and Identity in Contrast to a Biblical View**
17 **of Creation and Union with Christ** – Secular social justice and critical theory
18 ideology interprets an individual’s identity according to his/her ethnicity, gender,
19 so-called sexual orientation/preferences, and other traits, many (though not all) of
20 which are immutable and amoral. This categorization feeds into a hierarchical
21 arrangement in which certain groups are said to subjugate others based on their
22 ethnicity, gender, class status, etc. These inter-group divisions and
23 oppressor/oppressed designations reinforce the collective grid by which to
24 measure an individual (their value, worth, or alleged guilt within society), discover
25 social injustices, silence disagreement, and prescribe social change.
26

27 By contrast, the Bible teaches that every person is created in God’s image, reflects
28 his glory, and bears intrinsic value and worth as such (Gen. 1:27, Col. 3:10).
29 Christians have the additional benefits and blessings of being new creations in
30 Christ, united with him and adopted into the family of God (2 Cor. 5:17, Eph. 2:6,
31 Rom. 6:3-8, Eph. 1:5-10, Gal. 4:5-7). An individual’s ethnic background remains
32 spiritually, psychologically, and socially significant, yet fundamentally an
33 individual’s identity is either as an image bearer of God redeemed by Christ and
34 united with him, or as an image bearer united to Adam and in need of God’s
35 redeeming grace (Rom 8:1-11). This foundational reality about all humanity, and
36 not the oppressor/oppressed designations of the secular ideology identified above,
37 should determine our sense of self and guide our relationships with one another
38 (Eph. 2:13, Gal. 3:28).

¹⁰ Scholarly articles and books explaining and critiquing Critical Social Justice Theory and its derivations are numerous. See, for example, Timothy Keller, “A Biblical Critique of Secular Justice and Critical Theory,” Life in the Gospel, accessed January 10, 2023, <https://quarterly.gospelinlife.com/a-biblical-critique-of-secular-justice-and-critical-theory/>

1 **2. A Particular Conception of Guilt in Contrast to a Biblical View of the Fall**

2 – In secular social justice and critical theory ideology, oppressor classes (rather
3 than, say, the individual as a responsible agent, or particular policies—systemic or
4 otherwise—that can be identified, analyzed, and resisted), serve as the locus of
5 culpability within a social system. In other words, an individual’s guilt (defined in
6 terms of the aggrandizement of social goods and power) stems from his/her place
7 within the perceived hierarchy of oppression and identity classification on the basis
8 of skin color, gender, sexual preference or practice, and so on. As a result,
9 genuinely racist or sexist practices and policies tend to be absorbed into, and
10 thereby become undifferentiated from, the collective “guilt” of a perceived
11 oppressor class over against an oppressed class. For example, the color of one’s
12 skin (and/or one’s gender) is said to grant “privilege” and implicate one within a
13 range of supposedly “systemic injustices” in society, as evidenced by unequal
14 outcomes (of capital, education, opportunity, etc.) among racialized groups,
15 regardless of an individual’s particular attitudes, actions, or agency.

16
17 The Bible, on the other hand, teaches that all humanity inherits a sinful condition
18 from Adam (original sin) and commits actual sin as individuals and/or as groups
19 of individuals. To be sure, sin can take on “systemic” forms in a society, which
20 must be identified and overturned. But the Bible does not teach a hierarchy of sin
21 and guilt on the basis of ethnicity or other cultural markers. Rather, God indicts all
22 humanity as having sinned in Adam and as having fallen short of his glory (Rom.
23 3:23). An individual’s color of skin and gender do not carry inherent guilt or grant
24 privilege, but rather reflect the diversity of God’s creation including the creation
25 of every individual as male or female (Gen. 1:27).

26
27 **3. Its Subjective Notion of Knowledge and a Worldly Vision of Redemption in**
28 **Contrast to a Biblical View of Truth and Redemption**

29 – For secular social justice and critical theory ideology, so-called “lived experience” becomes the main
30 source of prescriptive knowledge, which the ideology then deploys in terms of its
31 matrix of relations of oppression. The remedies envisioned orient to social
32 transformation, deconstruction, reconstruction, and reparations. Reconstruction is
33 envisioned as an inversion of perceived or real present power structures, which
34 happens after a full deconstruction of the deleterious social structures supposedly
35 responsible for experienced oppression. The collective guilt of the oppressor
36 classes does not go away, rather is itself suppressed through these transformations.

37
38 For the Bible, knowledge and truth are centered in the self-revelation of the triune
39 God and redemption is centered in Christ and His accomplishment through his
40 cross and resurrection. The final reference point for knowledge, redemption, and
41 all spiritual blessings is external to us (Gen. 1, Jn. 1, Col. 1:15-23). In the Bible,
42 lived experience may be cause for reflection upon foundational truths and their
43 implications, but it is never to be a source of theological or ethical affirmations
44 that contravene biblical truths. Similarly, the remedies proposed by secular social
45 justice and critical theory ideology for the wrongs it identifies do not address, but

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1 rather reject, the true source of social ills (the fall, universal depravity, etc.), and
2 they proliferate and amplify our sinful propensities by instigating further division,
3 even by design. This ideology has no concept of repentance, forgiveness, and
4 reconciliation, which are foundational to the Christian worldview and the only
5 faithful response to the sin present in the world and in each of us, including the sin
6 of racism.

7
8 Given the incompatibility of secular social justice and critical theory ideology with
9 Scripture, we believe church leadership should be on guard against (1) beliefs in the
10 church that affirm oppressor classes and minimize the Biblical view of creation and
11 identity, or ways that such beliefs redirect the church’s mission away from a Gospel
12 focus and toward social causes that support and flow from the secular assumptions
13 identified above; (2) views that evidence these secular falsehoods, such as conceiving
14 of guilt in terms of so-called oppressor classes rather than of the law of God, or
15 interpreting Scripture through a non-theological lens (e.g., perceived experience,
16 secular socio-historical analysis) at the expense of Scripture’s self-witness,
17 hermeneutical supremacy, and Spirit-led intention of the human writer in context; and
18 (3) adoption of secular ideologically-driven remedies for racial reconciliation, even by
19 way of an unholy mixture with Gospel truth, rather than the pursuit of true racial
20 reconciliation in Christ, through the Spirit.

21
22 Since this secular ideology and its strands fail to recognize the eternal creator God and
23 the unity of humanity as created in his image; the result of the fall and the character of
24 sin, both individually and corporately; and the redemption and reconciliation that is
25 found in Christ alone, we declare that this ideology’s answer to race and racism is
26 incompatible with the truth of scripture, the PCA’s confessional standards, and our
27 ongoing commitment to *the gospel task of racial reconciliation* and *the furtherance of*
28 *the gospel*, and therefore disturbs the peace, purity, and unity of the church.

29
30 *Adopted by the Sessions of Carriage Lane Presbyterian Church, Covenant Presbyterian*
31 *Church, East Cobb Presbyterian Church, and Tucker Presbyterian Church and*
32 *submitted to Metro Atlanta Presbytery for its stated meeting on January 24, 2023.*

33 *Rejected by Metro Atlanta Presbytery at its stated meeting on January 24, 2023. [The*
34 *relevant extract of the Presbytery minutes has been provided to the Stated Clerk of*
35 *the PCA according to RAO 11-10.]*

36 *Attested by /s/ TE Randy Schlichting, stated clerk, Metro Atlanta Presbytery.*