

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

## A Woke Church is Doomed to Fail

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My church attendance leaves something to be desired and I can't cite Bible verses for every occasion. Yet for as long as I can remember, I have been a staunch supporter of the Christian church. But while I'm always willing to speak up for the church, it is not always willing to defend itself.

Iceland became a Christian country over a thousand years ago. Here, as in other Western countries, the teachings of Christianity and the work of the church have been enormously influential in shaping our societies. Yet all too often nowadays, the church in Western societies is silent on the issues that matter. All too often, it fails to offer even a basic defence of Christianity and Western values. All too often, it is left to those outside the church – sometimes atheists and agnostics – to speak up for the teachings of Christianity.

Perhaps inevitably, church attendance has been declining in many Western countries, including the United Kingdom; fewer people now identify as Christian than they did a generation ago. In my home country, proportional membership of the National Church of Iceland has gone from the high nineties during my youth in the eighties to just under 63 per cent this year. The situation has become so drastic here (and elsewhere) that it's not uncommon to hear Western societies referred to as 'post Christian'.

Many church leaders appear to have arrived at the conclusion that the best way to respond to this is to try to please those that are antagonistic towards Christianity. This has meant enthusiastically embracing the zeitgeist of our time; in short, the strategy is to 'go woke'. At times, this has involved pushing an agenda to compete with the most radical factions of socialist or green-movements. But this is doomed to fail and alienate the church's most loyal followers.

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In Iceland, Christmas has remained a time of unity and good will and Christmas traditions still hold great importance for most people. One of these traditions is attending Mass or listening to the nationally-broadcast sermon. Last New Year's Eve, the sermon that traditionally marks the start of a solemn evening (before the night's festivities) was rather unusual. The priest mentioned Jesus eight times but the main subject of the holy sermon, Greta Thunberg, was referenced nine times. A year earlier, on New Year's Day, Jesus got as many mentions as Greta (two).

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*Embracing the 'woke' zeitgeist is  
doomed to fail and alienate the church's  
most loyal followers*

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Earlier this year, the National Church of Iceland then decided to advertise Sunday schools with pictures of a bearded Jesus with makeup and breasts wearing a white dress and jumping around erratically under a rainbow. If anyone didn't like it, or had different ideas about Jesus, that was their problem. Those responsible for the advertisements then explained that they were just getting started with their plan to rebrand the Church.

Icelanders are nearly universally liberal in matters of sexuality and gender but this was a step too far. The Church lost support; hard-working parish council members and priests were furious. To her credit, Iceland's first female bishop in a thousand years put her foot down and stopped the campaign before more damage was done.

In the UK, bishops and other members of the clergy have been busy jumping on any bandwagon that passes by. That naturally involves some taking the knee and supporting BLM, an organisation that advocates defunding the police and breaking up the nuclear family, among other things. The archbishop of Canterbury has promised a 'review' of statues to see 'if they all should be there'. Like other bishops, Justin Welby has also spoken out on Brexit, describing the EU as 'the greatest dream realised for human beings' for over a thousand years. But if the promised land has been reached with a bureaucracy in Brussels, then what is the role of bishops anyway?

For some, the answer appears to be an attempt to save the world, not by spreading the Christian message, but quite literally by attempting to save planet earth with methods that would inevitably lead to an increase in poverty.

Extinction Rebellion behaves sometimes like a doomsday cult. Its supporters hold bizarre sermons and wear terrifying Grim Reaper outfits. Yet it has proved alluring to some of

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those in the church, including C of E bishops who have made gratuitous cameos alongside protesters causing disruption to people going about their daily lives. The organisation even now has its own Christian chapter, Christian Climate Action, with its own flag – the XR symbol with a small cross above it.

No one is saying Christians shouldn't care about the planet. But is it wise to link arms with a divisive organisation like XR? And shouldn't the church seek to offer hope to children, rather than endorse a movement that is likely to fill them with fear?

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In living memory, the church in East Germany and Poland stood up to tyrannical regimes by daring to stand for liberty and truth against an all-encompassing and dangerous fundamentalism. Once again, the church must dare to look to its founding principles and find the courage of its convictions. To do this, the church must again start believing in itself. It has been plagued by self-doubt, sometimes appearing to want to excuse its existence and sometimes trying to remain relevant by reinventing itself. This is a mistake.

A supporter of a football club will tell his friend from a rival club which team is best. This is usually done in good spirits. But the church seems to have difficulty mustering a similar conviction. We have come a long way from 'I am the way and the truth and the life.'

Yet the good news for the church is that it isn't too late. The message of the Christian church is as relevant and important as ever in our strange times.

The first thing the church should do is to stop excusing its existence and appreciate its own importance and achievements. Christianity has been instrumental in forging the culture of Western civilisations. Most of the world's great universities were founded by Christians; the church built up the welfare state long before governments took on that responsibility; and it installed ideas of equality when such ideas seemed unnatural. Christians also led the fight against slavery. And, in the midst of the current focus on fighting racism, it's worth remembering Reverend Martin Luther King Jr's inspiration when he was fighting for racial equality: his Christian faith.

With an increased sense of self-worth, the church would find a great need for its teaching in the modern world. The church could lead the way in tackling identity politics and other modern fallacies and base the response on its time-honoured teachings. It could challenge the inclination to divide people into groups by pointing to its belief that we are all created equal. It could also remind us to value democracy as a guarantor of peace.

The church can draw on the belief that humans hold a special place in nature and must use it and preserve it for their own good, rather than looking on nature as a deity and

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humans as an intruder in this world. It could confront modern misanthropy and be the champion of a commitment to continue reducing disease and poverty through human ingenuity and good will. It could remind us of the importance of forgiveness and understanding through debate and reject 'cancel culture' and intersectionality.

If Jordan Peterson can fill big venues with his message of the importance of taking responsibility – and base his views to a great extent on scripture – then why can't the church do the same? Rather than aggravating its followers, the church can become an answer to the angst and extremism of our times.

Christianity has stood the test of time, but a church that seeks to appease the zeitgeist of the time, rather than stick to its principles, will not. William Ralph Inge said 'Whoever marries the spirit of this age will be widowed in the next'. Christian denominations around the world are in grave danger of falling into this trap.

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