

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

The Wacky World of Wokeness

DENNIS A. WRIGHT, DMIN

In 416 BC, during the Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta, Athens decided to attack the neutral island of Melos. When the Melians protested that they had done Athens no wrong, the Athenians replied, “The strong do what they can; the weak suffer what they must.” The Melians were starved into surrender, their men were killed, and their women and children were sold into slavery.



1

None of this was unusual in the ancient world. The strong, it was supposed, had every right to dominate the weak. Cruelty, rape, torture, and slaughter were ordinary means of enforcing power. Neither the gods nor the moral codes opposed dominations. Atheist historian Tom Holland, describes his feelings about the Greco-Roman world this way:

“It was not just the extremes of callousness that unsettled me, but the complete lack of any sense that the poor or the weak might have the slightest intrinsic value.”¹

So, what changed? As Holland notes, the difference was Christianity.

Christians and Jews believed that all persons were made in the image of God. Thus, every person had intrinsic worth and dignity, no matter their race, ethnicity, gender, or strength. On this basis, oppression of the poor and weak was condemned. Neither might nor wealth made right. Christianity further emphasized the spiritual and moral equality of all people. Not only do we all share the same humanity, but we all suffer from the same problem (sin) and are in need of the same solution (salvation through Jesus).

Because of these ideas, Christianity is the sole historical source of concepts now taken for granted: human dignity, human equality, and universal human rights. As not only Tom Holland but other prominent atheists such as Jürgen Habermas and Luc Ferry admit, these ideas are at the root of our modern concern for the poor and oppressed.²

¹ Holland, Tom (2019). *Dominion: How the Christian Revolution Remade the World*, New York: Basic Books, 16.

² Stonestreet, John (2021). <https://breakpoint.org/why-wokeness-is-a-christian-heresy/> July 12, 2021. Retrieved May 24, 2022.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

On June 2, 2020, a crowd of mostly white people arrived at a library parking lot in Bethesda, Maryland, to show solidarity with a Black Lives Matter rally. During the rally, one of the organizers had the crowd raise their hands and take a pledge to oppose racism. The attendees obeyed and repeated the pledge, many kneeling as though in prayer. A video of the event made its way around the internet, providing yet more evidence that America is experiencing a religious revival on the political left — and that the heart of this revival is the deification of group identity.

2

IDENTITY POLITICS

Until the last few years, identity politics — now commonly referred to as "wokeness" — has avoided serious scrutiny as a religious movement. Yet even before the Bethesda episode, political observers had an inkling of its religious character. Professor Elizabeth Corey's recollection of her experience at a 2017 conference addressing identity and the law offers one illuminating example. One of the presentations she described featured a call-and-response session that ended with an exhortation for political revolution. "I began to feel that I was not at an academic lecture at all," she wrote, "but at an Evangelical church with a charismatic pastor."

Efforts to account for the religious aspects of this emerging phenomenon are already underway. George Washington University's Samuel Goldman theorizes that the moral relativism conservatives feared a generation ago has morphed into its own version of Puritanism. Essayist Joseph Bottum, too, contends that wokeness has its roots in liberal Protestantism, while Alan Jacobs of Baylor University compares wokeness to the theology of the Catholic Counter-Reformation. In a pun on the historical Great Awakenings of American Christianity, Matthew Yglesias, formerly of *Vox*, referred to the phenomenon as the "Great Awakening."³

THE PROBLEM WITH WOKENESS

It is quite apparent that wokeness is fraught with some serious problems. Consider what Chris Queen writes at PJMedia.com about problems generated by the woke:

- * *Wokeness seeks to destroy everything that is great about America and aims to remake this nation in a way that upends capitalism, individual freedom, the family, and Judeo-Christian values. The woke movement seeks to replace absolute truth with an ever-*

³ Patterson, James M (2022). © National Affairs, Inc. and the American Enterprise Institute. *National Affairs*, Number 51, Spring 2022. Retrieved May 22, 2022. <https://www.nationalaffairs.com/publications/detail/wokeness-and-the-new-religious-establishment>

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

changing concept of “truth” that changes with the whims and moods of every individual.

- * *We never see someone who is just “a little bit woke.” Wokeness is something one must devote all of oneself to — all or nothing. It becomes an identity and a lifestyle for the person who commits himself or herself to wokeness, much like a new convert to a religion.*
- * *Wokeness itself is a religion. It replaces God with political and cultural crusades, but unlike our Judeo-Christian heritage, this new religion of wokeness is missing one key thing: grace.*
- * *A little note here: I’m not saying that all leftists are wokes. I do know people of faith whose various political positions fall on the left. They’re still faithful people, even if I disagree with them and think that their ideas are misguided. In this article, I’m referring to people who have fallen whole hog for the woke ideology.*
- * *Let’s talk a little bit about grace (bear with me as we do some Bible study). The concept of grace is key to both Judaism and Christianity. ...*
- * *... In addition to God’s grace, there’s the grace that we’re supposed to show each other. Putting others first, treating them better than ourselves, and giving people the benefit of the doubt are human examples of grace.*
- * *Okay, now that we’ve established (somewhat rudimentarily) what grace looks like from a Judeo-Christian perspective, let’s explore how wokeness exhibits none of the grace that a Judeo-Christian America has always sought to display. ...*
- * *... For them, there is nothing beyond this life on earth, so they must create a paradise in the here and now. Everything that they see as wrong must be made right with ultimate urgency. That’s why the wokes want to enact such sweeping, fast change to American society.⁴*

WOKENESS IS MORE PREVALENT THAN EVER

Big businesses and public institutions are kow-towing to the latest activist trends. Cancel culture is engulfing more and more wrong-thinkers) in its (self-)righteous flames. Social media is awash with right-on, virtue-signalling images and essays, and almost daily there is a new racism scandal. Universities have long been recognised as a key battleground in

⁴ <https://www.johnlocke.org/wokeism-described-as-religion-without-grace/> January 18, 2022.

Retrieved May 22, 2022.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

the culture war. The blame is often placed on snowflake students. But the academy's role in producing these developments stretches back several decades. Helen Pluckrose is the editor of *Areo* magazine and co-author, with James Lindsay, of a new book, *Cynical Theories: How Activist Scholarship Made Everything about Race, Gender, and Identity – And Why This Harms Everybody*. *spiked* caught up with her to find out more.

- **spiked:** What is the thinking behind the explosion of wokeness taking place at the moment?
- **Helen Pluckrose:** It comes from a mixture of postmodern scholarship and leftist activism. People sometimes try to explain it too simply, when it actually has lots of strands. At the centre is a postmodern conception of knowledge, power and language. In short, there is the belief that knowledge is a construct dependent on dominant ways of talking. The powerful get to say what knowledge is and dictate how things are spoken about legitimately. Everybody on all levels of society speaks into this and perpetuates the power imbalance. These invisible systems of power are known as things like patriarchy, white supremacy, imperialism, cis-normativity, hetero-normativity, fatphobia, and ableism. These are all understood to be omnipresent below the surface, and to reveal themselves in the way people speak about things. Therefore, there is a need to interrogate speech and pick it apart and find the problematic biases behind it. That is the basic philosophy underlying it all.⁵

WHAT WOKENESS IS NOT

In his recent book, *Christianity and Wokeness: How the Social Justice Movement Si Hijacking the Gospel—and the Way to Stop It*, Owen Strachan writes: “As much as we need to know what wokeness is, we first need to know what wokeness is not.” He then enumerates several principles and actions that are righteous which come from Christian wisdom and not from any worldly system:

- * Wanting societal harmony across backgrounds and skin colors does not make you woke.
- * Wanting peace in fiery settings with a history of ethnic tension does not make you woke.

⁵ <https://www.spiked-online.com/2020/07/24/wokeness-is-being-pushed-on-everyone/> Retrieved June 4, 2022.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

- * Seeing massive failings in American and Western history, namely long and sustained patterns of racial thought and practice, does not make you woke.
- * Being troubled by Christians' complicity with racism in the past does not make you woke.
- * Adopting children from a different region or with a different skin color does not make you woke. Nor does an "interracial" marriage.
- * Grieving the needless deaths of human beings who are made in the image of God and bear God-given dignity and purpose does not make you woke.
- * Doing everything you can and know to do to build bonds with people different from you in various ways does make you woke.
- * Enjoying global culture and those who differ from your own background does not make you woke.
- * Knowing that Jesus Christ was a Middle Eastern Jew and not a white American with flowing golden locks does not make you woke.
- * Praying for greater diversity in your church through the saving of fellow sinners does not make you woke.
- * Wanting greater justice in a world that is filled with hostility, pain, and injustice does not make you woke.
- * Working to be more thoughtful with one's language regarding personal differences does not make you woke.
- * Recognizing that you have in yourself the sinful potential to spew the hate of partiality and to act on this in short-term or long-term ways does not make you woke.
- * Identifying troubling trends of partiality in one's national, regional, communal, or familial heritage does not make you woke, nor does wanting to leave such evil behind.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

- * Rejoicing in Gospel-driven fellowship across all common boundary markers in this world does not make you woke.⁶

WHAT, THEN, IS WOKENESS?

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.⁷ 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. In intellectual terms, wokeness occurs when one embraces the system of thought ... called Critical Race Theory. CRT teaches that all of societal life is structured along racial power dynamics.⁸

According to woke thought leaders, racism is the foundational basis for American structures and the country was completely designed for white people to rule. Based on what many woke leaders believe and teach, “Whiteness” and “white supremacy” now reign supreme in all facets of our society, and even if you have no links to racism, white supremacy, or the oppression of blacks, you are complicit if you are white.⁹

In a recent *Time Magazine*, article by Savala Trepczynski, she explains why all white people are the problem and need to figure out the solution for their white supremacy themselves. Just don't bother asking her how to start addressing the problem — she says:

“...it is white people (especially progressive white people) who are responsible for what happens now. Either they work to understand—and change—how white supremacy moves in and through their lives, hearts, minds, and spaces, or they decide they don't have time, they're too scared, they can't deal with it, or, like Ms. Cooper, they linger in the fallacy that they could never be involved in a racist incident. Either they accept that they have inherited this house of white supremacy, built by their forebears and willed to them, and they are now responsible for paying the taxes on that inheritance, or the status quo continues. I hope they will become radicalized by this moment and begin to fight fiercely for

⁶ Strachan, Owen (2021). *Christianity and Wokeness: How the Social Justice Movement Si Hijacking the Gospel—and the Way to Stop It*, Washington, DC: Salem Books, 4-5.

⁷ For more on the background of the term “woke,” see C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African-American Experience* (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1990), 372. Strachan uses the term in its present-day usage as defined by the Cambridge English Dictionary: “a state of being aware, especially of social problems such as racism and inequality.”

⁸ Strachan, *Christianity and Wokeness*, 8.

⁹ Hinn, Costi (2021). © For the Gospel Ministries, July 1, 2021. Retrieved May 22, 2022.

<https://www.forthegospel.org/read/5-reasons-why-woke-is-broke>

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

racial justice; but more than that, I hope they start at home, in their own minds and hearts. As I tell my students: a white person rushing to do racial justice work without first understanding the impacts, uses, and deceptions of their own whiteness is like an untrained person rushing into the ER to help the nurses and doctors—therein probably lies more harm than good.

“One thing though: don’t ask me how to start. That’s part of your work, too. The answers are all around you if you are willing to look and listen.”¹⁰

7

This is not surprising when one considers the fact that much of the woke agenda comes from unbelievers trying to solve racial division through human theories. No believer should be shocked. Why would the unbelieving mind rely on anything except the unbeliever’s method to deal with what they believe to be the problem with our society?¹¹

WHERE DID ALL THIS IDEOLOGY COME FROM?

Strachan answers, “In two words: Karl Marx. And two more: Friedrich Engels.” He explains that this duo sent shockwaves through the West following the publication of *The Communist Manifesto*. Alongside the economic argument, they made this foundational claim: “Hitherto, every form of society has been based, as we have already seen, on the antagonism of oppressing and oppressed classes.” Therefore, “the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles. Freeman and slave ... lord and serf, guildmaster and journeyman, in a word, oppressor and oppressed.”¹² This perspective on human identity and societal ordering fit fluidly with Darwinian cosmology, the spread of which Marx cheered in his era.¹³

THE NEW RELIGION OF THE WOKE LEFT

Tripp Parker writes that much has been made of how the “woke” left’s political program resembles a new religion.¹⁴ Columbia University linguist John McWhorter made the point¹⁵ in his discussion with evolutionary biologist Bret Weinstein, James Lindsay

¹⁰ <https://time.com/5846072/black-people-protesting-white-people-responsible-what-happens-next/>

¹¹ Hinn, Costi. <https://www.forthegospel.org/read/5-reasons-why-woke-is-broke>

¹² Mark, Karl and Engels, Friedrich. *The Communist Manifesto*, 9.

¹³ Strachan, Owen. *Christianity and Wokeness*, 19.

¹⁴ © *The Federalist*. Tripp Parker discusses this at length in his article “The New Religion Of The Woke Left Is A Faith Without Atonement.” <https://thefederalist.com/2020/06/30/new-religion-woke-left-faith-without-atonement/>. *NOTE: This article is well worth the time to examine more closely.*

¹⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y-FOCZVLTaw>

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

describes¹⁶ how “wokeness” resembles a cult, and Hans Fiene wrote a satirical article¹⁷ in *The Federalist* describing the religious program in the “Cathedral of Blessed Wokery.”

Regardless of its origins, wokeness is quickly becoming the established faith in the legal and regulatory framework of the American political system, as well as in elite corporate culture and academia. This development is already beginning to provoke controversy. As wokeness continues to increase its influence in the public arena, it risks colliding with the anti-establishment principles its adherents pushed to enshrine in the law.¹⁸

Parker astutely observes that the woke Left’s program *does* seem to resemble a religion. This should not, however, be all that surprising to us. Jonathan Haidt points out¹⁹ how humans use sacred ideas, rituals, and symbols as unifying forces that allow us to participate in large scale societies. Most non-insect social creatures participate in small social networks of very close kin. Insects such as bees may have large scale societies, but they’re all essentially siblings and share a very high percentage of genetic material.

Humans are different. We aren’t all direct siblings with whom we need to cooperate and co-exist, yet we collaborate at a scale like no other species on earth. This is accomplished by a collective recognition of something as “sacred,” be it a rock, an ancestor, an idea, or even a god. Then, we organize around that shared sacred artifact. We become brothers and sisters in religion, almost as if we were created to do just that. It shouldn’t shock us, therefore, that with the left’s increasing rejection of Christianity, a new religion would necessarily emerge to fill the void. It is inevitable. It’s hard for humans to function without some sort of unifying force like religion. Indeed, we seem hard-wired to seek one out.

So, how is the Woke Left similar to a religion? Well, even without a supernatural element, it has all the trappings of one. It has a core set of beliefs that you cannot question and remain in the tribe with myths that aren’t subjected to normal academic scrutiny (the 1619 Project²⁰); it has sacred texts (*White Fragility*), its idea of original sin (being born white and/or male), rituals (including self-flagellation), symbols, heretics (hello, JK Rowling), and *de facto* priests and prophets to enlighten and then initiate us into this new religion.

¹⁶ <https://newdiscourses.com/2020/06/cult-dynamics-wokeness/>

¹⁷ <https://thefederalist.com/2019/01/10/woke-progressives-turn-public-shaming-ritual-formal-religious-ceremony>

¹⁸ Patterson, James M. *National Affairs*, Number 51, Spring 2022. Retrieved May 22, 2022.

<https://www.nationalaffairs.com/publications/detail/wokeness-and-the-new-religious-establishment>

¹⁹ <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2012/06/moral-motivations>

²⁰ <https://www.politico.com/news/magazine/2020/03/06/1619-project-new-york-times-mistake-122248>

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

All will be shown a new way of viewing everything about the world, and we must adopt this without caveats or questions.

Parker then nails it with this observation: “There is, however, one conspicuous yet critical thing missing from this new religion—one central to Christianity but absent from the “faith” of the Woke Left: Atonement.” Indeed!

FIVE REASONS WHY WOKE IS BROKE

When one considers the fact that much of the woke agenda comes from unbelievers trying to solve racial division through human theories. It is not surprising, then, that “woke is broke”! Hinn thinks that no believer should be shocked. Why would the unbelieving mind rely on anything except the unbeliever’s method to deal with what they believe to be the problem with our society?

But when countless Christians jump on the bandwagon of wokeness it is horribly problematic. Such doublemindedness is akin to being “tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine” (Ephesians 4:14 ESV). It is related to the pragmatism of past decades that has torn the church apart. What is pragmatism? In this context, it means to cave to whatever the culture is angry about and try to do what “works” to appease them and win them. It is abdicating our role as a beacon of Christ’s truth and bowing to the vile calling of the culture.

Some of this behavior by professing Christians is due to ignorance. That is fair to say. However, much of it is due to compromise. No matter where you stand, you must *understand* that wokeness is anti-Christ and anti-gospel. Therefore, it is anti-Christian. For the believer, woke is broke. Here are five simple reasons why:²¹

1. *Cancel culture is graceless*

Wokeness cancels anything or anyone that doesn’t bow to its ideology. How is that Christian? How is that grace? It’s graceless. Juan Riesco, a [Christian deli owner in Chicago](#) experienced this first-hand. Nini’s Deli went from being the top-ranked restaurant in Chicago on Yelp to running for his life. His deli was sponsored by Nike, celebrities wore his swag, and life for his family was everything that an American could dream of from a business standpoint. Then, his Christian faith, Biblical view of sexuality and gender, and failure to cave to the demands of the culture made him the favorite target of Black Lives Matter and they turned him into public enemy #1. But he was white, right? No. He was

²¹ Hinn, Costi. <https://www.forthegospel.org/read/5-reasons-why-woke-is-broke>

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

part of an immigrant family of Cuban, Mexican, and Lebanese descent. You can watch his full story here: [Paint the Wall Black: The Story of Nini's Deli](#).

Cancel culture preaches this: *believe what we say to believe or else we will destroy your life*. Cancel culture plays God. Christianity pursues grace.

2. *Victimization is self-righteous vengeance*

Romans 12:19 declares, “Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written: “VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY,” says the Lord.” But time and time again we see woke culture taking revenge into their hands. Black Lives Matter destroys cities and businesses of whites, and non-whites alike. Again, this is understandable at the very least because sinners are going to sin. Pagans will act like pagans. Heathens are going to act like heathens.

But when successful Christian influencers make themselves out to be victims because their ancestors were victims of the heinous sin of the slave trade, they begin to breed an attitude of self-righteous vengeance in a time where they have not even the slightest level of pain and oppression that their ancestors endured. They believe they are “owed” something in their own mind. Best-selling authors, driving Range Rovers, living in beautiful homes, leading thriving churches, writing freely, living freely, educating their children freely, enjoying countless measures of opportunity are somehow victims?

Hurt people hurt people. Carrying the offenses of the past into the present is little more than self-righteous vengeance. God will deal with the wickedness of the past. Many woke Christians demand vengeance now—taking matters into their own hands—like the culture.

3. *The gospel message isn't enough*

To the woke mob, repentance isn't enough. You must raise a fist. Preaching Christ is fine, but preaching Martin Luther King is better. The gospel of Jesus Christ that pours out grace upon sinners, showers mercy over the underserving, and washes away the past (2 Corinthians 5:17) is the anti-thesis to the gospel according to wokeness.

Wokeness breeds and needs a gospel that goes beyond Scripture so it can continue to heap guilt-tripping burdens onto the backs of people who must pay for the sins of their forefathers.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

4. Wokeness is “hypocritical racism”

Any professing Christian who insists on making blanket statements regarding all white people is reversing the racism they claim is enacted against them. I don't need to unpack this much further. This man with two medical degrees will do that just fine. Watch this:

5. Greed and exploitation are a growing theme

I can't pretend to know every motive of every woke thought leader who professes to be a Christian, but professing Christians should have nothing to do with demands for reparations or leaders who feed “victim mentality” and division in order to get themselves rich. Some appear to be trying to cash in on guiltting white people, giving the impression that there is no amount of reparations or repentance that can atone for the sins of the past. Is there any instance in which people “pay for the sins” of the past in the New Testament? Do the Jews pay the Gentiles money or vice versa? Does land get exchanged between Ephesian believers and those in Philippi or Corinth because a Gentile ancestor once held prejudice towards a Jew? More than that, did this ever happen in the generations that followed?

WOKENESS MAY BEST BE DESCRIBED AS A CHRISTIAN HERESY

In view of all this, I think that it is accurate to consider “wokeness” to be a Christian heresy. “Heresy” comes from the Greek verb *hairein*, which means to choose. The idea is: heresy is the result of choosing one thing that is true and then running with it until it distorts everything else. Wokeness—a way of seeing the world built on critical theory—*fastens onto the Christian idea that oppression is evil* but makes it the sole significant fact about humanity and society, while rejecting so much else that Christianity teaches — original sin, forgiveness, and salvation.

It should not be difficult to see why various expressions of critical theory and “woke” rhetoric resonates with so many Christians. The appeal is rooted in legitimate biblical concerns about the poor, the marginalized, the oppressed, and the potential misuse of power. However, it fails on many other levels.

First, the anthropology of critical theory misunderstands *who we are* by assuming that the only relevant fact about us is where we fit within the various categories of oppression. We are the group we belong to, which serves a social role as either oppressor or oppressed. As such, this theory rejects any universals that unite humanity, including the image of God.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

Second, the understanding of sin, or *what's wrong with the human condition*, is limited to oppression. In this view, oppressors are guilty and the oppressed are innocent. The universality of human guilt before God, that we all are broken and sinful, that we are all in need of forgiveness and redemption is replaced by a moral reckoning that is dependent on which group we belong to. Human identity, human nature, and human problems are all flattened onto a single spectrum of oppression.

Given its failure to diagnose sin, it's not surprising that critical theories lack an adequate understanding of salvation. At best, a semblance of acceptance is offered to those who accept its worldview, but even then, the guilt of certain groups and the moral superiority of other groups is fixed and perpetual. This also means that forgiveness and reconciliation are effectively ruled out *a priori*. Even for the oppressed, there is no path for healing; no bearing one another's burdens; no easing the burden of pain by forgiving another.

In the end, wokeness is built on a worldview without salvation and offers an eschatology with no real hope. Though the proclaimed goal is to end oppression, it's what the late sociologist Philip Rieff called a "deathwork," dedicated to tearing down things but unable to build, or offer, anything better. Advocates of critical race theory, for example, argue that although race is a cultural construct, racism is an inevitable and irredeemable trait of certain groups and society. They cannot offer a vision of the world in which this sin is defeated or redeemed, much less one in which the guilty are forgiven and restored. The best that can be hoped for is to replace one set of powers with another.

Playing off of legitimate concerns about power and corruption, concerns first introduced to the world by a Christian vision of life and the world, critical theories push these ideas to the point of reframing the Gospel.

THE LAST WORD

The real problems with race and injustice in America need to be addressed. However, any expression of critical theory fails even as an analytical tool for Christians because it is built on a flawed and contrary worldview.²²

The best way to deal with this flawed Woke Worldview is boldly present the Christian Worldview. We must always remember that while it is our job to present the truth of the Gospel, it is the job of the Holy Spirit to convict the hearts of fallen people. Jesus said, "you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32 ESV).

²² Stonestreet, John (2021). <https://breakpoint.org/why-wokeness-is-a-christian-heresy/> July 12, 2021. Retrieved May 24, 2022.