

CENTENNIAL REVIEW

Principled Ideas from the Centennial Institute

Volume 14, Number 3 • March 2022



Publisher, Dr. Donald W. Sweeting

Editor, Jeff Hunt • Assistant Editor, Jaimie Erker

CHRISTIANITY AND WOKENESS: HOW THE SOCIAL JUSTICE MOVEMENT IS HIJACKING THE GOSPEL

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In November 2021, Dr. Owen Strachan discussed his new book as part of our Distinguished Lecture Series on Colorado Christian University's campus.

In May 1968, a student witnessed the Paris Uprising. Motivated by Marxism of a rather indeterminate kind, this riot featured many young men and women attacking the institutional employees of post-war France. The student described the revolution in vivid terms: "In the narrow street below my window in Paris, the students were shouting and smashing... [The police] were greeted by flying cobblestones and several of them fell. One rolled over on the ground, clutching his face, from which the blood streamed through tightly clenched fingers. There was an exultant shout. The injured policeman was helped into the van and the students ran off down a side street throwing cobblestones as they went."¹

This student's firsthand acquaintance with the Marxist revolution led him in the opposite way from what he saw. He found wisdom in the conservative tradition and became the strangest of creatures in the intellectual world: a conservative. His name was Roger Scruton.

Why are we talking about Paris in 1968? We begin here because our moment in 2021 is remarkably like Scruton's. The West has gone through a kind of "socialist cleansing." And America in 2020, by and large, was the epicenter of this

renewed uprising. What we experienced and, in different ways continue to experience, is a renewed socialist revolution. Fifty years later, we are still battling for civilization.

We are not merely battling for a true, humane, and noble public order. As Christians, we also seek to advance the kingdom of Christ on earth. Our challenge today is a great one. In our time, "wokeness" is running amuck. In the summer of 2020, riots broke out all across America in the name of equity, fairness, and social justice. America was put to the torch – and shockingly few responded. It struck at the very heart of law and order while blaming supposedly unjust law and order for precipitating the crisis. A single instance of purportedly racist police conduct against a man named George Floyd was emblematic of an entire system of oppression.

Let's consider the central arguments of wokeness in order to respond to the revolution of our time. Our response cannot merely respond to the charges, but must ultimately aim at a theology of public engagement to fight against the darkness, speak truth in love, and live as salt and light.

In her "Prayer of a Weary Black Woman," Chanequa Walker-Barnes wrote the following: "Dear God, please help me to hate white people. Or at least to want to hate them. At least,

I want to stop caring about them, individually and collectively. I want to stop caring about their misguided, racist souls, to stop believing that they can be better, that they can stop being racist."² Where does such evil, anti-Christian language come from? It comes from one source: "wokeness." Wokeness involves "awakening" to the belief that everything in our society

is racist. Woke Americans realize that America is not a just and righteous public order in any sense; it is actually racially unjust, from roots to branches. And, once you go woke, you become resolved to fight the existing order. You become an agent of change against oppression.

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Centennial Institute sponsors research, events, and publications to enhance public understanding of the most important issues facing our state and nation. By proclaiming Truth, we aim to foster faith, family, and freedom, teach citizenship, and renew the spirit of 1776.



Dr. Strachan is the author of *Christianity and Wokeness: How the Social Justice Movement is Hijacking the Gospel – and the Way to Stop It*.

The key perpetrator of oppression and racial injustice is the social construct of “whiteness.” This construct is created when there is a majority of white people in a society, like ours, and it is then used to create racial disparities. This construct is the explanatory key to all division, inequality, and injustice in our society and the church. Whiteness is perpetuated by white people and thus white people are worthy of special targeting. In intellectual terms, wokeness occurs and advances when one embraces the system of thought called “critical race theory.” It teaches that all of societal life is structured along racial power dynamics and equips its adherents to be activists against the existing public order.

There are seven key affirmations that make up wokeness and critical race theory. The first affirmation of wokeness is that racism is ordinary, not aberrational. Critical race theory is not imaginary, neutral, or merely a system of teaching American history with an exploration of racism as many would like you to believe. It is a particular angle on history that argues that racism is ordinary. Advocates of CRT make it very clear that the normal human experience in a society like ours is that of racism. Racism is not only evil action or evil speech – it is personal, structural, and pervasive. The more white people there are in a society determines how much more power they have compared to people of color, which means that racism must be everywhere.

Second, racism in America is known as “white supremacy.” Woke theorists and activists do not recognize the presence of majority cultures; they argue that American majority culture

is uniquely poisoned by white supremacy. This means that anyone making their way through life in everyday America deals with white supremacist culture everywhere. Wokeness is a secular conversion; it’s a way of seeing the world anew. Perhaps you once thought that the world was fair and at least somewhat just; however, when you embrace this ideology, you accept a totally different paradigm. You are no longer going to treat people of different races or backgrounds as if you have any commonality with them. Depending on what race they are, you are going to treat them as if you are implacably opposed to one another.

The third affirmation of wokeness is that all white people are racist. For wokeness, critical race theory, and intersectionality, racism is inherently structural to society. If you’re white, you belong to the power group in America. If you’re a person of color, you belong to the minority group and will be wronged by the power group. In America’s past, there are real racial sins in relation to slavery, Jim Crow, and other acts of racism. We understand that we all come equipped with partiality; it’s part of our sin nature. However, woke people believe that there is no way to stop this sin nature. Wherever this ideology goes, it divides and destroys communities and churches.

The fourth affirmation of wokeness is that our biggest problem is not the racists of an extraordinary time; rather it is the ordinary people. If you are tracking with wokeness as an ideology, many people think that they are not indicted by it. There is a whole body of literature about how leftists think

they can be woke and that it will absolve them of their racial sins; however, that is not the case at all. Ibram X. Kendi, one of the leading woke academic theorists today wrote: “The most threatening racist movement is not the alt-right’s unlikely drive for a White ethnostate, but the regular American’s drive for a ‘race-neutral’ one.”³ Wokeness saves its strongest firepower for ordinary men and women who lead quiet, normal, un-racist American lives. The greatest

threat to society are the people who have never gone through the secular conversion of wokeness to realize that, if they are white, they are white supremacists, and, if they are a person of color, they are someone who has not challenged the system of white supremacy.

Fifth, the solution to this condition is not regeneration or the Gospel; it is only anti-racist social justice. In this system, you are never cured of racism. You do not gain a new nature, so you have to go through a woke secular conversion to see the world afresh and then live the rest of your life like an addict, trying to fight your natural addiction to white supremacy and support what is called “social justice.” Social justice is now redefined as an attempt to destroy the existing public order. It looks to discover societal differences and asserts that these

Wokeness is an ideology that will take you captive and ruin the way you think as a Christian.

“inequities” are injustices. To correct this injustice, the top group has to come down and the lower-ranking groups need to be lifted up. Social justice entails destroying the existing public order in order to build a new one. One where there is true equity – not merely equality of opportunity, but equality of outcome.

Sixth affirmation: wokeness leads to a greater vision of oppression and justice called “intersectionality.” Intersectionality means that many minority groups have intersecting interests because they are all oppressed. Intersectionality says that the oppressed people can come together over their causes that intersect and fight the existing unjust social order. Minority categories and oppression are not limited to racial differences. Men oppress women. The rich oppress the poor. Physically able people oppress physically disabled people. Straight people oppress sexual minorities. Thin people oppress fat people. If you have multiple dimensions of minority identity, the greater right you have to lead in society. Thus, we see that wokeness makes minority identity a privileged category and deems the majority groups inherently opposed to the minority groups.

The final affirmation of wokeness is that the church should indict white people for their white supremacy. Ordinary white people should be identified as white supremacists and called to repentance; not on the basis of their individual actions, but simply on the basis of their participation in structures of oppression. The church is supposed to be a display of Gospel love and unity, made up of saved people from all different backgrounds. Today, some pastors are going woke, indicting white people from the pulpit by accusing all white people of the sin of white supremacy. One of the worst sins of wokeness is that it teaches that one can judge another and call them to repentance strictly based upon skin color. That is evil; no one should do that to anyone else.

Wokeness is an ideology that will take you captive, hijack you, and ruin the way you think as a Christian. There is an antithesis between Christianity and the world; there is an unbridgeable gap between truth and lies. All of these things do not blend into one harmonious whole. They are distinct,

Our plan of unity, our means of justice, and our gateway to hope are found in the Gospel.



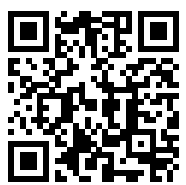
Dr. Owen Strachan with Jeff Hunt, Director of the Centennial Institute.

and Christians have spent too much time in the last ten to twenty years trying to appease the world and show them we are not “that” type of Christian. We should always be seeking to bear the fruits of the spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). We should always be seeking to speak truth in love, but we must also differentiate truth from lies. We must destroy woke ideological speculations by operating through intellectual, theological, and spiritual rescue missions.

Many of us feel disheartened and confused. We feel like the country we love is slipping away by the hour. We need to recognize that wokeness is a system of intellectual exploitation and we need an effective response to this exploitation. Christians must be honest about racism, slavery, and the failings of America's past. We can be clear-eyed about the failings of our country, just as we are clear-eyed about God's grace

in our own failings. However, we must also understand that wokeness is not seeking a balanced perspective on America; it is seeking to indoctrinate others to hate America and oppose everything it stands for.

We also need to promote a true, biblical vision of humanity. We are all made in God's image; some of us are not more



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human than others. Imago Dei: all humanity made in the image of God yet fallen, rebelling against God, depraved by nature, and still bearing dignity and able to express different capacities given to us by God. We don't demonize anyone as Christians. We call sinners to account, don't we? We believe that if they will repent of their sin and confess it to God through faith in Christ's blood and resurrection, they will live eternally. We believe every person is redeemable – no one is too far gone for God.

How should we live then? We must show wokeness for what it is and we cannot try to execute a peace treaty with the world. We must understand the system, work through how it is lying to us, expose it, and help others understand the truth. There is a need for a theology of the public square. Wokeness has come in through the back door into evangelicalism. The church needs direction – we need pastors with courage who will educate their people on conscience issues as well as political issues. We also must strive to be salt and light in the world by building strong families and churches. One of the most profound and powerful ways to be salt and light is to have a godly marriage. A marriage where the husband and wife want to spend time together, where a mother and father love their children and train them. Beyond this, we need to support good governance. Christians must be engaged and committed in their communities and stand against evil. It is a blessing to live in a free civilization and it deserves to be fought for.

Our plan of unity, our means of justice, and our gateway to hope are found in the Gospel. The cross, in many ways, is our



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doctrine of justice. The cross of Christ is also our doctrine of mercy. On the basis of the cross, we can do the strangest thing in the fallen world – we can forgive. People today think that forgiveness is weak; however, I think forgiveness is iron strong. When someone has wronged you, there can be months or years of grievances, of anger. We have a list of grievances that we can access at any time and hold someone accountable – justice. But, what if we do something different? What if we set the list aside and we forgive? This is strength; this is what God the Father has done with us. Condemnation brings division, hatred, hostility, and death. Forgiveness brings life and peace.

The days are evil but even greater than evil is the grace of God. John 1:5 says: “Light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” And it never will. ■

¹Roger Scruton, “Why I became a conservative,” *The New Criterion*, February 2003, <https://newcriterion.com/issues/2003/2/why-i-became-a-conservative>.

²Chaniqua Walker-Barnes, “Prayer of a Weary Black Woman,” *A Rhythm of Prayer: A Collection of Meditations for Renewal*, ed. Sarah Bessey (New York: Convergent Books, 2020), 69.

³Ibram X. Kendi, “Ibram X. Kendi defines what it means to be an antiracist,” an excerpt from *How to Be an Antiracist*, Penguin Random House, June 9, 2020, <https://www.penguin.co.uk/articles/2020/june/ibram-x-kendi-definition-of-antiracist.html>.



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