

## WOKEISM – THE NEW RELIGION OF THE WEST

Written by Max Funk on August 4, 2020

There is a new religion. It is moving like a tidal wave through every facet of western culture, shaping and redefining society as it goes. This religion masquerades under the guise of compassion and justice, but underneath is an evil ideology that is incompatible with western values and incongruent with the Christian worldview. This movement did not start in Minneapolis on May 25th, when George Floyd was murdered. That event acted as a watershed moment for an ideology that has been growing for decades. If left unchecked, this new religion could lead to a complete unravelling of western culture.

There are many names for what we currently find ourselves in; wokeness, political correctness, and cancel culture are some of them, but these only encapsulate a portion of the phenomenon. Cultural Marxism, neo-marxism, social justice, identity politics, and Critical Theory are broader descriptors. We would like to use a term that adequately captures the religiosity of the movement: wokeism.

Wokeism is a religion. Although it has not been organized into any formal religious structure, it has all the functions of religious doctrine. It has a unique epistemology (theory of knowledge), an evaluation of the human condition, and a redemption narrative. But from where did it come?

### Critical Theory

In the early 20th century, a German school of philosophy called the Frankfurt School developed a social philosophy called Critical Theory. In a nutshell, Critical Theory critiques culture and challenges the underlying power structures of society. It is a movement to “liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them,” reinterpreting western culture as a story of the oppressor vs. oppressed. In Critical Theory, the only things that exist are hierarchies of power, and those hierarchies must be torn down. The goal of this movement, whether stated or not, is nothing less than the complete dismantling and rebuilding of western culture from the ground up.

Critical Theory started to become prominent among western academics in the 90s and eventually infiltrated almost every university in the western world. In recent years, the ideology has left the university and has made the jump to media and corporate culture, establishing itself as the primary moral culture within western societies. Currently, the main lines of separation between oppressors and oppressed are race, sex and gender identity.

This is not just a political or social movement within the framework of traditional enlightenment values. Concepts such as logic, science, and reason are viewed as tools of the oppressive white patriarchy. Values like individualism, hard work, punctuality and delayed gratification would be understood as perpetuating white supremacy. Critical Theory has become much more than a social philosophy and is the primary philosophical driving force behind the new civil religion of wokeism.

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### The New Religion

Why call wokeism a new religion? The fact is that the rise of secular humanism over the past 70 years created a religion-shaped hole in our culture. Secularism, for all of its cultural dominance, failed to offer a robust philosophy of meaning and purpose, nor did it provide any moral framework for how to act within the world besides “be a good person because the alternative is undesirable for everyone.” Alternatively, wokeism has developed its view of reality with its own set of values and narratives. From the ashes of secular humanism, a new civil religion rises.

Wokeism offers everything that secularism failed to provide, and has quickly filled the God-shaped hole in our culture. It purports its version of truth, justice, righteousness, sin, and judgement. It provides its adherents meaning, with its meta-narrative of societal conflict, power struggle and the struggle for redemptive freedom. The tearing down those oppressive power structures helps give purpose to the individual and the collective. These values are solidified in public rituals like sensitivity training or confronting white fragility. There is a strong communal aspect, and people feel like they are part of something greater than themselves. Also inherent in this “social progress” is the hypothetical future utopian society liberated from the evils of the current oppressive

system. Most of all, however, Wokeism offers what every sinful human heart deeply longs for, and that is moral justification. People believe they are acting justly within the world, and being fair, sometimes they are. But often, all that they are doing is mere posturing, or worse, destructive.

That is not to say the Wokesim offers total absolution to its followers; in fact, it is quite the opposite. To be tearing down oppressive power structures means that you are also profoundly aware of your prejudices. James Lindsay, a mathematician, academic, and atheist, was recently on Joe Rogan and said:

“Some religions look up, they’re looking at God, and they’re afraid of sin, but they’re paying attention to God, and they’re thinking about renewal, they’re thinking about redemption, they’re thinking about forgiveness. And then some religions look down, and all they do is look at sin. If you look up, then religion can be great, it can lead people in spiritual development, community and so on, but if you’re looking down, if you’re obsessing about sin, you’re going to start obsessing about everybody else’s sin too.”

The ideas of sin (privilege) righteousness (victimhood) and damnation (cancellation) are well established within Wokeism. While it provides rituals of penance (“check your privilege” and “allyship”) and piety (kneeling during the anthem or posting black squares), what it never offers is forgiveness. In a recent interview with Dave Rubin, theologian Nathan Finochio described the phenomenon:

“If I’m stuck in the oppressor group and there’s no escaping it, there can be no forgiveness if there’s no repentance, right? Like, isn’t that how it works? So I’m just perpetually a sinner, and I’m just going to continue to perpetuate the oppressor group, and there’s nothing that I can do. Of course, cancel culture is actually the logical conclusion of Critical Theory...because they have to get rid of the oppressor class.”

#### Differences with Christianity

What’s so nefarious about Wokeism is that it regularly plays on people’s better motivations such as compassion and a desire for justice. Most people have a genuine desire to see the lives of others improve, and many Christians have engaged with these ideas as if they are congruent with the teachings of Christ. Of course, there are disparities in our society where justice is needed. Still, the point is that Wokeism has different interpretations for the concepts of truth, justice and equity and leaves no room in the conversation for alternative ways of addressing those issues. Wokeism is incompatible with the biblical worldview, differing in several key ways. First, it attributes intrinsic guilt or innocence to the individual based on their group identity, regardless of individual actions.

**Proverbs 17:15**, He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the Lord.

The belief at the core of western culture is that each individual is made in God’s image and is therefore intrinsically worthy of dignity and respect. This idea sits at the foundation of our legal system as well. In the biblical moral framework, the individual is responsible to God for his or her actions. The notion that sin or righteousness could be inherited based on one’s natural identifiers, like race, gender, or descent, was refuted when the Lord spoke to the prophet Ezekiel.

**Ezekiel 18:1-3**, The word of the Lord came to me: “What do you mean by repeating this proverb concerning the land of Israel, ‘The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children’s teeth are set on edge’? As I live, declares the Lord God, this proverb shall no more be used by you in Israel. Behold, all souls are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine: the soul who sins shall die.

The New Testament takes it a step further, saying that “From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh.” (2 Corinthians 5:16) As followers of Jesus, we are not to judge people based on natural identifiers (race, age, sex, etc.); instead, we are to evaluate them based on the moral standards of the scriptures and treat them as equals, created by God.

Second, the narrative of redemption that Wokeism puts forward is entirely antithetical to the Christian narrative. The biblical stories present the pattern of the individual, in relationship with God, as the primary mechanism for

the redemption of the world. This pattern culminates with Christ as the perfect man and sacrifice for the sins of the world. Our belief in his finished work and submission to his Lordship is our motivation to act justly within the world. Therefore, the ideal Christian behaviour is one of mercy, peace, kindness, and forgiveness.

Wokeism, on the other hand, presents the redemptive pattern of various groups vying for power within an inherently oppressive system. In this tribalistic vision of the world, the only thing that exists is power, and if only power exists, then power and control are necessary to tear down a corrupt system. In this narrative of redemption, violence is easily justified. For this reason, we have seen violent riots and not just peaceful protests sweeping America over the past two months.

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### Possible Futures

Western culture has already reached its tipping point. Critical Theory has become the mainstream social philosophy, and Wokeism has become the new civil religion. There are two conceivable ways that our future will unfold. The first is that Wokeism will eat itself and dissolve because these ideologies are inherently self-consuming. If the only thing that exists is power, then corrupt power structures must be torn down. It could be that enough people will begin to wake up to the cognitive dissonance that is being shoved down our collective throats, but that is an incredibly optimistic view of the current situation.

What's more likely is the second option; that these ideas will be taken to their logical conclusion. In the interview mentioned above, Nathan Finochio said that "cancel culture is actually the logical conclusion of Critical Theory... because they have to get rid of the oppressor class." Rubin responded with the following.

"I hate to tell you I think it's beheading that is the logical conclusion of cancel culture."

We have already seen an autonomous zone called CHOP (named after the French Revolution) and a guillotine in front of Jeff Bezos's house. People seem to think that something like "The Great Leap Forward" couldn't happen in the western world, but it's precisely this assumption that could be our undoing.

### How Do We Respond?

Bradley Campbell recently wrote an article for Quillette, saying:

"However it plays out, those who have problems with the new culture, or with aspects of it, aren't going to get anywhere simply by dismissing it or mocking it. To the extent that social justice culture offers a new moral vision, they'll need to offer an alternative moral vision."

As Christians, we must be the ones to offer this "alternative moral vision," namely, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We cannot incorporate Critical Theory into the Gospel. The mixture of these two ideologies will only result in Church fracture, the loss of brotherly love, and the perversion of the Gospel. Unfortunately, many believers have already integrated these doctrines into their theology. The trojan horse of Wokeism has entered the Church. Time will tell how the Church responds.

Again, all this is not to say that we shouldn't care about issues of justice or socioeconomic disparity. Black lives do matter. Just law enforcement policies are important. Poverty should be alleviated. These issues deeply matter to the heart of God, and we need to be seeking God's solution to address the roots of the problems. But God has already put forward his definitions of sin and righteousness, justice and redemption. His interpretations are the ones that matter, and his meta-narrative is the one that we are actually living in. It's up to the Church to identify the lies of the enemy, speak the truth in love, and seek the solutions that come from heaven. Perhaps it's not too late.

Isaiah 5:20-21, Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter. Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight.