

## WEEK 11 | WOKISM

Force should be right; or rather, right and wrong—  
Between whose endless jar justice resides—  
Should lose their names, and so should justice too.  
Then every thing includes itself in power,  
Power into will, will into appetite;  
And appetite, a universal wolf,  
So double seconded with will and power,  
Must make perforce a universal prey,  
And last eat up himself.

Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*

### INTRODUCTION

Though it has apparently fallen out of use,<sup>1</sup> ‘woke’ has become a familiar, almost ubiquitous buzzword representing a set of beliefs that have permeated throughout our society over the past decade. Specifically, “wokeness” has become a colloquialism for Critical Theory and the beliefs associated with it like intersectionality, privilege, microaggressions, social justice, etc.

The more familiar Critical Race Theory, or CRT, is really a sub-discipline of Critical Theory, or CT.<sup>2</sup> CT is “neo-Marxism on postmodernist steroids—a deeply uncongenial point of view cynically weaponized for the deconstruction and dismantling of social structures.”<sup>3</sup> It combines the neo-Marxist<sup>4</sup> tenet of cultural hegemony and its focus on liberating the oppressed with the postmodern philosophy of post-structuralism and deconstruction, forming an applicable and actionable blueprint for transforming society and ushering in an Edenic utopia.

My contention will be that CT constitutes a worldview, and a religious one at that—hence the title “Wokism.” Though it inherits postmodernism’s rejection of metanarratives—overarching stories that answer the big questions about life—it offers answers to those questions that are at

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<sup>1</sup> Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez says “wokeness” is “almost exclusively used by older people these days.” Kyle Morris, “AOC blasts Carville for using term ‘wokeness,’ says mostly ‘older people’ use the word,” published November 6, 2021, accessed November 23, 2021, <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/aoc-blasts-carville-for-using-term-wokeness-says-only-older-people-use-the-word>.

<sup>2</sup> Other subdisciplines would include Postcolonial Theory, Queer Theory, Feminism and Gender Studies, and Disability and Fat Studies.

<sup>3</sup> John MacArthur in Owen Strachan, *Christianity and Wokeness: How the Social Justice Movement is Hijacking the Gospel—and the Way to Stop It* (Washington, D.C.: Salem Books, 2021), xix.

<sup>4</sup> We should not overlook the substantial influence of classical Marxism as well. Marx wrote in *The Communist Manifesto*, “Hitherto, every form of society has been based, as we have seen already, on the antagonism of oppressing and oppressed classes.” Marx and Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 9.

odds with Biblical Christianity to the extent that the two cannot coexist. It is the offspring of ungodly ideologies, providing a faulty lens through which to view the world. Though it often rightly identifies problematic symptoms, it misdiagnoses the underlying pathology and offers a cure that is worse than the disease.

Many commentators have noted that CT shares many traits of religion, especially Christianity:

Just as Christianity teaches that all human beings are stained by original sin, so contemporary critical theory teaches that all people (or at least almost all people) are stained by their membership in oppressor groups. Just as Christianity teaches that we must confess and repent of our sin, so contemporary critical theory teaches that we must confess and repent of our participation in structures of power and privilege. Just as Christianity teaches that sin must be atoned for, so contemporary critical theory teaches that our privilege must be atoned for. Just as Christianity looks forward to the kingdom of perfect justice and righteousness, contemporary critical theory looks forward to a utopian society of perfect justice and equity.<sup>5</sup>

Though it might appear to be focused solely on social issues, Wokism is an alternative worldview to Christianity, a secular religion that provides a different way of looking at the world and that gives different answers to the most important questions. While there are points where we can be sympathetic to Wokism, ultimately, we must reject it as an unbiblical worldview and a false religion. What follows is a brief overview of the core tenets of Wokism followed by a Biblical evaluation of and response to them.

One note on method: many of the examples used in this discussion will pertain to CRT in particular because it is the most widespread and talked about discipline of CT and, thus, provides the most examples that illuminate this worldview. We should be careful not to confuse the two, however, as Wokism, while used most often in the context of race discussions, extends far beyond race to how society as a whole is structured.

## **CRITICAL BELIEFS**

Though Critical Theory is a broad field of disciplines full of nuance, the following are some key tenets that pervade the various disciplines and give shape to the Woke worldview as a whole.

### **I. ONTOLOGY**

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<sup>5</sup> Neil Shenvi and Pat Sawyer, “Engaging Critical Theory and the Social Justice Movement,” from *Ratio Christi*, accessed at <https://ratiochristi.org/engaging-critical-theory-and-the-social-justice-movement/>. See also James Lindsay and M. Nayna, “Postmodern Religion and the Faith of Social Justice,” *Areo*, Dec. 18, 2018.

While it would be difficult to find Critical Theorists who comment on questions regarding the origin of the universe, Wokism teaches a distinct view of reality with both descriptive and prescriptive elements. Specifically, it sees reality through the lens of power and disproportionate power dynamics that exist between different groups of people. Society is divided up into “oppressed groups and their oppressors along the lines of race, class, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, physical ability, age, weight, and a host of other identity markers.”<sup>6</sup> As one Critical Theorist has written, “[Critical theory] studies the systems and forces that shape adults’ lives and oppose adults’ attempts to challenge ideology. . . [and] unmask power.”<sup>7</sup> As you can see, these power dynamics are systemic and pervasive, a part of the very fabric of society. Speaking on the presence of systemic racism, Robin DiAngelo writes,

Racism is deeply embedded in the fabric of our society. It is not limited to a single act or person. Nor does it move back and forth, one day benefitting whites and another day (or even era) benefitting people of color. The direction of power between white people and people of color is historic, traditional, and normalized in ideology. . . Whites hold social and institutional positions in society to infuse their racial prejudice into the laws, policies, practices, and norms of society in a way that people of color do not.”<sup>8</sup>

As you can see, these oppressive power dynamics are everywhere, often unseen and unrecognized by the actors in the dynamic itself.

We should also note that oppression in the woke worldview is defined differently than normal. Whereas oppression would normally be understood as the cruel or unjust exercise of power by one party against another, in Wokism oppression is understood in terms of “hegemonic power.” Drawing on its neo-Marxist roots where the idea of cultural hegemony was developed, CT asserts that certain groups of people—the oppressors—impose their norms, values, and expectations on the rest of society through certain discourses (ways of speaking about things) which are then supported and upheld by societal institutions. Two prominent critical theorists write, “In any relationship between groups that define one another (men/women, able-bodied/disabled, young/old), the dominant group is the group that is valued more highly. Dominant groups set the norms by which the minoritized group is judged.”<sup>9</sup>

The above situation grows more complicated with the introduction of the doctrine of intersectionality, which teaches that for certain individuals “patterns of subordination intersect. . .

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<sup>6</sup> Shenvi and Sawyer, “Engaging Critical Theory.”

<sup>7</sup> S.D. Brookfield, *The Power of Critical Theory for Adult Learning and Teaching* (Jossey-Bass, 2005), 132.

<sup>8</sup> Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility Why It’s So Hard for White People to Talk about Racism* (Boston: Beacon, 2018), 22.

<sup>9</sup> Özlem Sensoy and Robin DiAngelo, *Is Everyone Really Equal? An Introduction to Key Concepts in Social Justice Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2017), 25.

Intersectional subordination need not be produced; in fact, it is frequently the consequence of the imposition of one burden that interacts with preexisting vulnerabilities to create yet another dimension of disempowerment.”<sup>10</sup> What Kimberlé Crenshaw, who coined the term “intersectionality,” is describing is the individual who is part of multiple oppressed groups (in her example it is females of color) and thus experiences even more significant marginalization and oppression than he or she would if only belonging to one of those groups. Rather than being able to neatly divide society into two groups—the oppressor and the oppressed—like classical Marxism did, Wokism teaches that every individual falls somewhere along an oppression spectrum based on a variety of identity markers.

This is the structure of social reality that Wokism teaches, and it will have significant implications for how it understands human identity, epistemology, and morality.

## II. ANTHROPOLOGY

You will recall from our discussion on postmodernism the concept of “situatedness,” the idea that individuals are situated observers who have a limited perspective on reality they are unable to transcend. This led to the assertion that all our beliefs, convictions, and values are determined by our place in society—a radical subjectivity in which the individual can only know and is thus defined by their social circumstances. Wokism adopts this epistemological viewpoint and, in combination with its understanding of reality discussed above, asserts that “our identity as individuals is inextricably bound to our group identity. From the perspective of contemporary critical theory, our experience of reality, our evaluation of evidence, our access to truth, our moral status, and our moral obligations are all largely determined by our membership in either a dominant oppressor group or a subordinate oppressed group.”<sup>11</sup> What is most central to your identity, then, is the sum total of the intersections of various power dynamics at play in your life.

Again, we remind ourselves that each of these various identity markers—race or ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, physical ability, and socio-economic status have a form of oppression associated with them. In terms of race/ethnicity, there is racism; gender and sexism; sexual orientation and heterosexism; socio-economic status and classism; physical ability and ableism; age and ageism; religion and religious oppression. The significance here is recognizing that an individual is either oppressed or an oppressor by virtue of characteristics they (generally) have no control over. This is a form of collectivism that assigns guilt not to individuals who have committed wrong actions but to entire groups irrespective of individual actions and activities. “Oppressors” are guilty by association, by virtue of being identified with groups that are viewed as dominant in society.

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<sup>10</sup> Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color,” in *Stanford Law Review*, vol. 43, no. 6 (Jul. 1991), 1249.

<sup>11</sup> Shenvi and Sawyer, “Engaging Critical Theory.”

This collectivist approach to anthropology produces a moral asymmetry between different groups of people. Members of oppressor groups are not viewed as moral neutral but as intrinsically guilty, regardless of how upright their individual behavior might be. This can be seen in a couple quotes from the field of CRT. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic write,

The narrative behind this assumption [that affirmative action is unjust] characterizes whites as innocent. . . . By contrast, many critical race theorists and social scientists hold that racism is pervasive, systemic, and deeply ingrained. If we take this perspective, then no white member of society seems quite so innocent.<sup>12</sup>

Peggy McIntosh, who coined the term “white privilege,” describes her own experience coming to grips with her guilt by virtue of being part of an oppressor group. She writes, “My schooling gave me no training in seeing myself as an oppressor. . . . I was taught to see myself as an individual whose moral state depended on her individual moral will.”<sup>13</sup> From her quote you can see that her guilt is not because of her individual actions but her group association.

Under wokism an individual’s identity is determined by their relations to others in society as dictated by identity markers outside their control. Significantly, this identity has a distinct moral element: one is either oppressed or an oppressor, and this fact is intrinsic to their identity and inescapable. Ibram X. Kendi writes, “We can knowingly strive to be an antiracist. Like fighting an addiction, being an antiracist requires persistent self-awareness, constant self-criticism, and regular self-examination.”<sup>14</sup> Note that, while one can fight against their inherent racism, they can never overcome it. Like an addiction, it can only be managed—there is no true freedom from this sin.

### III. EPISTEMOLOGY

As mentioned above, the postmodern concept of situatedness is significant in woke theology. In fact, it is an individual’s social location that determines their ability to access truth. In other words, “our membership in dominant or subordinate social groups. . . . impedes or enables our perception of truth.”<sup>15</sup> You’ll recall that postmodernism’s view of language is that language functions relationally rather than referentially—words derive their meaning from their relationship to other words and not from their correspondence to external reality. This structuralist approach views language as an arbitrary social construction. When you combine

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<sup>12</sup> Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 91.

<sup>13</sup> Peggy McIntosh, “White Privilege and Male Privilege,” *Race, Class, and Gender: An Anthology* (Belmont: Wadsworth, 1992), 72.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>15</sup> Shenvi and Sawyer, “Engaging Critical Theory.”

structuralism with the cultural hegemony of neo-Marxism, then language itself is a social construct that functions to affirm maintain the cultural hegemony of the oppressors. Thus, critical theorists will often talk about oppressive/dominant/hegemonic discourses (a story told by the oppressors to justify their position of power and privilege) as a means by which the dominant group justifies their oppression. These discourses function in society to make the status quo seem fair and normal, thus preventing the oppressed groups from recognizing their oppression and seeking liberation. Richard Delgado writes, “Ideology—received wisdom [discourses]—makes current social arrangements seem fair and natural. Those in power sleep well at night; their conduct does not seem to them like oppression.”<sup>16</sup>

One of these oppressive discourses is the desire for objective truth. Postmodern philosophy rejects the possibility of objectivity and thus objective truth, an assertion wokism adopts. Wokism goes even further by identifying rationality and objectivity as distinctly western forms of thinking that are themselves oppressive because they diminish other forms of arriving at “truth,” especially the place of lived experience. Critical theorists contend that “an oppressor’s perception of reality is necessarily distorted by his participation in structures of power.”<sup>17</sup> In other words, his beliefs about what is true is tied up in false, oppressive power structures. His perception of truth, then, is limited by those very structures that maintain his privilege. Robin DiAngelo writes in *White Fragility*, “Whites also produce and reinforce the dominant narratives of society—such as individualism and meritocracy, and use these narratives to explain the positions of other racial groups.”<sup>18</sup> Paulo Freire goes further in describing the blinding effect that the oppressor’s social situation has on his ability to perceive truth when he writes,

The oppressors do not perceive their monopoly on having more as a privilege which dehumanizes others and themselves, they cannot see that. . . for them, having more is an inalienable right. . . More and more, the oppressors are using science and technology as unquestionable powerful instruments for their purpose: the maintenance of the oppressive order.<sup>19</sup>

As you can see, the oppressor is unaware of his or her privilege at the expense of others because they have been utterly blinded by their social location and the very discourses that have been used to prop up that social location. In other words, someone who is part of an oppressor group cannot access the truth about reality.

The above describes what is referred to as standpoint epistemology, which posits that one’s position in society relative to systemic power dynamics either limits or confers additional

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<sup>16</sup> Richard Delgado, “Storytelling for Oppositionists and Others,” *Michigan Law Review*, vol. 87, no. 8, p. 2411-2441.

<sup>17</sup> Shenvi and Sawyer, “Engaging Critical Theory.”

<sup>18</sup> Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018), 27.

<sup>19</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 56.

knowledge or insight about oppression and the system it operates in. The oppressed have this special knowledge due to their position in society, which enables them to achieve a “liberatory consciousness” and “construct counter-narratives which challenge the false narrative of oppressor groups attempting to control [them].”<sup>20</sup>

Sandra Harding has developed the mechanism of standpoint epistemology. Roughly speaking, while the “master” (the oppressor or dominant class) experiences life as a master in the master’s world, the “slave” (the oppressed or subordinate) experiences life as a slave in the master’s world and thus derives insight about both social positions.<sup>21</sup> Thus, the oppressed are better able to perceive reality as it actually is—their position in an oppressed group gives them better access to objectivity than a dominant position would have.<sup>22</sup> This knowledge is simply not available to the oppressor, leading some critics to liken CT to a modern form of Gnosticism. The consequence of this is that only the oppressed can affect the societal change wokism desires. In Paolo Freire’s words, “It is only the oppressed who, by freeing themselves, can free their oppressors. The latter as an oppressive class, can free neither others nor themselves.”<sup>23</sup>

The concept of intersexuality is significant in wokism because it compounds the effect of standpoint epistemology. Thus, the more oppressed an individual is (the more oppressed groups are a part of their identity), the more special knowledge they have access to. Patricia Hill Collins writes, “Because race, gender, class, sexuality, ethnicity, age, nationality, and religion constitute major axes of power in early twenty-first century global politics, they catalyze multiple forms of social inequality. Intersectionality contributes the important insight that social inequalities are multiple, complex, and mutually constructing,” thus offering “a more robust analysis of social inequality.”<sup>24</sup> Accessible truth operates on a spectrum. The most oppressed have the greatest access to objective truth, while those who are guilty of the most oppression have access to the smallest, least objective perspective on reality.

The responsibility of the oppressor is to give due authority and listen to the oppressed in order to be enlightened. As mentioned above, the demand for objective evidence or rational dialogue are regarded as oppressive demands imposed on the oppressed to discredit their lived experience and silence them. Karen Barbour writes,

Within Western contexts, ‘knowledge’ was traditionally defined as that information gained through reason. . . discovering truth and reality through

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<sup>20</sup> Shenvi and Sawyer, “Engaging Critical Theory.”

<sup>21</sup> Sandra Harding, *The Feminist Standpoint Theory Reader: Intellectual and Political Controversies* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 7–8. See also James Lindsay, “Standpoint Epistemology,” *New Discourses*

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 56.

<sup>24</sup> Patricia Hill Collins, “Social Inequality, Power, and Politics: Intersectionality and American Pragmatism in Dialogue,” *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* (vol. 26, no. 2, 2012), 455.

rational method, impartiality, detachment, and objectivity. . . feminists and phenomenologists have suggested that ‘knowing; can be based on lived experience. From lived experience knowledge could be constructed by individual and communities, rather than being universal and resulting strictly from rational argument.

One can see postmodern elements in this statement, specifically the idea that “knowledge,” here essentially synonymous with truth, is not “universal” but relative, particular to individuals and communities. Oppressed communities have communal truth society needs but is inaccessible to anyone in a different social situation.

#### IV. ETHICS

Wokism is not content to just describe reality as it sees it. It is an inherently ethical worldview and thus has a prescription for the disease it has identified. Namely, “Critical theory research critiques historical and structural conditions of oppression and seeks transformation of those conditions.”<sup>25</sup> There you can see its function goes beyond the descriptive (“critiques”) to the prescriptive (“seeks transformation”). Whereas postmodernism was in nihilistic in its outlook, content to merely expose the power imbalances and oppression in society but offering no solutions, Wokism offers a solution that it believes will bring about the promised utopian state. Its ethic can be summed up in a single word: liberation. One author writes, “Since its inception, critical theory has been primarily concerned with the elimination of oppression and the promotion of justice. . . Liberation is a theme that runs through critical theory; Liberation from objective oppressors such as colonizers and exploitive employers, and liberation from subjective forces such as mass culture and ideology.”<sup>26</sup>

Liberation is the goal and it will only be achieved through societal transformation. Paulo Freire writes,

Since it is a concrete situation that the oppressor-oppression contradiction is established, the resolution of this contradiction must be *objectively* verifiable. Hence, the radical requirement—both for the individual who discovers himself or herself to be an oppressor and for the oppressed—that the concrete situation which begets oppression must be transformed.<sup>27</sup>

Freire goes on to clarify that this is an “objective transformation of reality,” a transformation of the concrete, material circumstances of a society. The above quote is notable for a number of reasons. First, you see the deep influence of Hegelian dialectics on Freire, who describes the

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<sup>25</sup> C. Glesne, *Becoming Qualitative Researchers: An Introduction* (Boston: Pearson Education, 2011).

<sup>26</sup> Heather Davidson, et. al., “Power and Action in Critical Theory Across Disciplines: Implications for Critical Community Psychology,” *American Journal of Community Psychology* (2006), 36.

<sup>27</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 50.



need to resolve “the oppressor-oppressed contradiction.” In other words, the abstract and its negative must collide to produce a concrete, transformed reality. Second, there are significant religious undertones throughout. The oppressor needs to discover himself to be an oppressor, akin to a moment of salvation where the oppressor recognizes and repents of their sin. A “radical requirement” is then placed on the penitent oppressors, which he earlier clarifies is tangible, concrete work to end oppression. “To do nothing tangible,” he says, “is a farce.”<sup>28</sup> Genuine enlightenment will lead to a transformed life.

This liberation of the oppressed is the meaning critical theorists give to the popular—and perhaps less startling—term “social justice.” Mary McClintock writes, “Working towards a celebration of diversity implies working for social justice—the elimination of all forms of social oppression. . . . Social injustice takes many forms. It can be injustice based on a person’s gender, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, physical or mental ability, or economic class.”<sup>29</sup>

One of the difficulties in critiquing wokism is its use of so many terms that we would normally affirm. Christians ought to be for things like equality, social justice, liberation, and the dismantling of oppressive regimes. The problem, however, is that critical theory has re-defined these terms, co-opting the term’s historic connotation while promoting a new denotation in line with the overall goal of critical theory: the total transformation of society. We are reminded that critical theory defines oppression as including both objective and subjective elements (see Heather Davidson’s quote above). As Shenvi and Sawyer write, “contemporary critical theory would define oppression to include not only those gross manifestations of misogyny, but the entire system of ostensible male supremacy and social dominance.”<sup>30</sup> In this situation, woke adherents would need to fight not only against overt sexual harassment, but also against “more subtle forms of male supremacy like the existence of traditional gender roles in marriage or assumed color preference in children’s nursery and clothing.”<sup>31</sup> They succinctly identify the upshot of this situation:

Critical theory’s pronounced focus on liberation has the effect of minimizing, relativizing, or even negating the existence of other moral duties. Critical theorists will speak extensively about our obligation to overturn oppressive systems, to liberate the marginalized, and to seek justice, but will rarely speak about other moral virtues like honesty, kindness, chastity, patience, and forgiveness. Moreover, there are cases in which virtues like marital fidelity, modesty, or

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<sup>28</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 50.

<sup>29</sup> Mary McClintock, “How to Interrupt Oppressive Behavior,” *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 483.

<sup>30</sup> Shenvi and Sawyer, “Engaging Critical Theory,” 6.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 6-7.

civility will be problematized as constructs of oppressor groups that need to be challenged rather than obligations that need to be honored.<sup>32</sup>

The ethic of wokism cannot but compete with the Christian ethic as laid out in Scripture. An individual seeking to uphold both would inevitably be put in a situation in which they are forced to compromise on one or the other, compromise which neither system can accept.

## CRITICAL ERRANCIES

As you likely already recognized from the above discussion, there are a number of significant issues with the woke worldview. We'll attempt to address them in broad categories.

### I. KNOWLEDGE & REVELATION

Christians affirm that reason is not omniscient; that is, we reject the Enlightenment notion that through reason alone we can arrive at genuine knowledge of the truth. However, we do affirm that we use reason to understand God's revelation in both nature and Scripture to arrive at genuine knowledge of the truth. As Shenvi and Sawyer write, "When we study science or economics or philosophy, we are using reason to understand the works of God in the universe he created. When we study Scripture, we are using reason to understand the words of God in the Bible he inspired."<sup>33</sup> Due to the noetic effects of sin our reason and knowledge will be imperfect, fallible, and at times in need of correction. However, in order to study theology, reason and logic are indispensable. Further, we affirm that truth is transcendent. Truth is objectively true irrespective of an individual's position in society, and it can be discovered through revelation and the application of reason by any individual irrespective of their position in society. Truth is not something relegated to those who have special access. Christians are not Gnostics.

Wokism, on the other hand, insists that individuals who are members of oppressor groups are blinded by their privilege position in society and thus cannot access certain knowledge that is only possessed by those in oppressed groups. Thus, if oppressed and oppressor disagree, the critical theorist does not need to resort to an objective source of truth, like objective evidence or even divine revelation. He or she can simply appeal to their subjective lived experience as authoritative due to their position in society, and the individual in the oppressed group has no recourse to counter this claim. In wokism "there is no deeper ontological grounding for truth; rather, wokeness simply asserts its commitments without foundation beyond our own narratives. Human narratives *are* the grounding of truth in the woke system."<sup>34</sup> Any appeal to objective standards will be perceived as an appeal to an oppressive discourse that only evidences their privilege and blindness.

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<sup>32</sup> Shenvi and Sawyer, "Engaging Critical Theory," 7.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>34</sup> Strachan, *Christianity and Wokeness*, 107.

Going further, if a member of an oppressed group disagrees with the claims of wokism, the critical theorist can appeal to “internalized oppression,” which occurs when “subordinate individuals are so immersed in the theology of the dominant group that they come to believe it.”<sup>35</sup> They have not achieved the liberatory consciousness necessary to transcend their social position and are still bound by their oppression. Thus, wokism shuts down all debate by claiming that any disagreement is only evidence of systemic oppression. In this situation, truth becomes a possession of a select group, the “woke.” The rest must listen and learn to achieve enlightenment. One can draw parallels to periods in church history in which only the clergy had access to the Scriptures and the laity were forced to rely on them as mediators to divine truth. The “woke” are the modern priests of secular woke religion, mediating social gospel to the masses.

This epistemology directly undermines the doctrine of Sola Scriptura by identifying another source of truth other than divine revelation. Further, it calls into question the nature of Scripture because, drawing on its postmodern roots, wokism would reject the idea of single meaning, arguing instead that a text can have multiple meaning depending on the individual or community engaging with it. Meaning is relativized (though not totally relative since an oppressed group’s interpretation will be more “true”), which means truth is relativized and thus rendered meaningless.

## II. IMMANENT IMAGO DEI

A Biblical anthropology begins by affirming what all human beings have in common: the *imago dei*, the image of God. All of us were created in God’s image, providing the foundation upon which our identity is built. We are “not fundamentally disunited, but united by our common theistic formation. We are one human race.”<sup>36</sup> We were all made in God’s image (Genesis 1:26-27) and possess inherent dignity and value as image-bearers (Genesis 9:5-6; Exodus 20:13; Psalm 139:13-14). Further, we are all sinners (Rom 3:23; 5:12) in need of redemption and restoration only offered in Jesus Christ (John 14:6; 1 Timothy 2:5). There is a great deal that unites all humanity. This is not to deny human diversity. In fact, human diversity is an element of the *imago dei*, representing the diversity within the triune Godhead, and it will be a diverse humanity that constitutes the people of God in the eschaton (Revelation 7:9). This is simply a diversity in unity.

Wokism, on the other hand, begins with and emphasizes our diversity rather than our unity, dividing humanity along the lines of race, gender, sexual orientation, age, physical and mental ability, etc. Rather than give priority to the transcendent image of God that unifies us, wokism gives priority to immanent, man-made distinctions that act divisively. This is exactly what is

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Strachan, *Christianity and Wokeness*, 59.

transpiring in our culture along racial lines, where “whiteness” is viewed as inherently evil and oppressive over and against minority ethnicities.<sup>37</sup>

At its core, wokism is defining identity by its horizontal relationships to other people and other demographic groups rather than its vertical relationship to the Creator God, a reversal of the order set forth in Scripture. It leaves few if any opportunities for solidarity between oppressed and oppressor because their identities are determined by their social situation. Thus, there is no foundation for true unity. We must be thoughtful about the implications of this for the church. In Ephesians 2:11-23 Paul writes,

<sup>11</sup> Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called “the uncircumcision” by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands— <sup>12</sup> remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. <sup>13</sup> But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. <sup>14</sup> For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility <sup>15</sup> by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, <sup>16</sup> and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. <sup>17</sup> And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. <sup>18</sup> For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. <sup>19</sup> So then you are no longer strangers and aliens,<sup>[d]</sup> but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, <sup>20</sup> built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, <sup>21</sup> in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. <sup>22</sup> In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ has “broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility” so that the church would be a diverse body of believers enjoying the unity of one Spirit. Rather than hostility, there is peace; rather than enmity, reconciliation; rather than two distinct bodies of people—oppressed and oppressors—there is one body in Christ. Adopting the woke worldview would only introduce division and enmity into the church that Christ died to destroy. It would be to trample on his blood and reject the horizontal peace and reconciliation that is ours by virtue of our vertical peace and reconciliation with God.

### III. THE OPPRESSOR GOD

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<sup>37</sup> One wonders if the situation is reversed in countries where whites are the minority.

The woke obsession with oppression as hegemonic discourses that the ruling class uses to justify its position calls into question the Biblical narrative and God's character. The Bible, after all, unfolds a metanarrative that it treats as universally true for all people at all times and in all places—a claim critical theory regards as inherently oppressive. This, wokism and Christianity are on a worldview collision course and cannot coexist.

Further, in accordance with the woke ideology God would have to be understood as the Ultimate Oppressor. He is a being who claims absolute authority over everyone and everything. He has established a single, universal moral law according to His nature, and against this law every single individual will be judged, regardless of their ethnicity, gender, sex, age, tribe, or any other identity marker. He has offered but one way of salvation, one system of belief by which an individual can escape this judgment. “To critical theorists, these totalizing, comprehensive, exclusive claims are utterly unacceptable.”<sup>38</sup>

#### IV. THE STAIN OF SIN

One of the most concerning elements of wokism is that its ethic is rooted in a distinct moral asymmetry between oppressed and oppressor, with several implications that sharply diverge from the teaching of Scripture.

First, Scripture teaches that every individual is born with a sin nature regardless of their race, gender, sexual orientation, or any other identity markers (Ephesians 2:1-3). Sin is a universal problem affecting all who descend from Adam (Romans 5:18-19); one's position in society has no bearing on this. Whether rich or poor, black or white, male or female, we all have the same problem and need the same solution. Wokism, however, links “sin” or guilt to one's place in society and where they fall along the lines of power present in society. Some are born “sinners,” others are born free from sin. This status is not dependent on a person's actions but on factors over which they have no control. Because there is no redemption in wokism—only repentance and confession—there is no salvation, no escaping this situation.

We should also recognize that Jesus, who was born a man in a heavily patriarchal society, would have to be considered part of the dominant, oppressive group of his day and, thus, guilty of the privilege and benefits he would have received because of his gender. Yet the idea that the Son of God was guilty of any evil or moral deficiency flies in the face of Scripture's clear teaching (Hebrews 4:15). To identify Jesus as an “oppressor” who needed to “confess” his privilege is as unbiblical (and blasphemous) as one can get, and completely undermines the gospel message.

Second, Scripture teaches clearly that each individual will be judged individually, according to their own actions (Romans 2:6; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 1 Peter 1:17; Revelation 20:12). In wokism, however, a person is judged not by their actions but by their associations to various oppressor groups, so that even if they have never committed an oppressive act, they remain guilty for

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<sup>38</sup> Shenvi and Sawyer, “Engaging Critical Theory,” 18.

allegedly benefitting from an unjust and inequitable system.<sup>39</sup> This notion of guilt is antithetical to Scripture. Even texts that indicate a corporate repentance (Ezra 9:6-15; Nehemiah 1:4-7; Daniel 9:1-9) must be understood in light of Deuteronomy 24:16 which reads, “Fathers shall not be put to death because of their sons, nor shall children be put to death because of their fathers. Each one shall be put to death for his own sin” (see also 2 Kings 12:20-21, c.f. 2 Kings 14:5-6; Ezekiel 18:1-32). The testimony of Scripture is clear: no one is guilty of the sins of their ancestors. Wokism rejects this teaching and asserts that because, oppression is systemic, anyone benefitting now from an evil act in the past is guilty of that act and must repent and do penance to atone for it.

Third, Scripture holds every individual to the same standard of conduct regardless of any identity markers. Every human being is judged according to God’s law rooted in His holy character. This accountability is universal and impartial (Leviticus 19:15; Deuteronomy 25:15). In Wokism, however, the scales are imbalanced. The oppressor and the oppressed are judged differently, and partiality is affirmed. Ibram X. Kendi writes,

if racial discrimination is defined as treating, considering, or making a distinction in favor or against an individual based on that person’s race, then racial discrimination is not inherently racist. The defining question is whether the discrimination is creating equity or in equity. If discrimination is creating equity, then it is antiracist. If discrimination is creating in equity, then it is racist. . . The only remedy to racial discrimination is antiracial discrimination.<sup>40</sup>

Here you can see a clear moral asymmetry—what is right for one individual is wrong for another, depending on their position in society and the target of their action. The Bible, however, is clear that partiality is always wrong, even when it favors the “oppressed” (Exodus 23:2-3). The rich and the poor are to receive equal treatment under the law. Wokism intentionally creates this moral asymmetry, willing to pay any cost in the hopes of ushering in utopia.

## CONCLUSION

Wokism is a radically different worldview than what is presented in Scripture. Owen Strachan has called it “Utopian Judicial Paganism” and helpfully describes its philosophical categories:<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Kendi writes, “A racist is someone who is supporting a racist policy by their actions *or inaction* or expressing a racist idea. . . We can unknowingly strive to be a racist” (Ibram X. Kendi, *How to Be an Antiracist* [New York: One World, 2019], emphasis mine).

<sup>40</sup> Kendi, *How to Be an Antiracist*.

<sup>41</sup> Strachan, *Christianity and Wokeness*, 126–27.

<b>Anthropology</b>	Neo-paganism (no Creator, no creation order, we are our own rulers)
<b>Sexual Ethics</b>	Compulsive libertinism (we express our desires, and all should approve)
<b>Political Theology</b>	Marxist Statism (we trust the state to rule us and make things right)
<b>Metaphysics</b>	Postmodern Darwinism (evolution explains life with no absolute truth)
<b>Theology Proper</b>	Mystic Selfism (we should follow our hearts, not any authority)
<b>Soteriology</b>	Therapeuticism/Ritualism (we become our best self by doing the workd)
<b>Eschatology</b>	Utopian Earth-Centrism (we'll make the earth right through social justice)

Wokism also offers a radically different system of ethics and morality than the Bible. It redefines key terms—like justice, equality, and oppression—and contorts true morality into a distorted monster, a Universal Wolf that only consumes. As the intersectionality games progress, we will see that power dynamics and oppression can ultimately be parsed down to the individual, so that everyone will be both guilty and innocent in relation to someone. No one will ever escape their guilt. There is no redemption in wokism, no salvation, no peace, no unity, no hope.

Wokism is a false religion and, as Christians, we must reject it as one. This does not mean we should not take seriously the symptoms it identifies. As Christians, we should be concerned about the physical and material suffering of God's image-bearers. As Christians, we should be whole-heartedly devoted to true, Biblical justice and the equal treatment of all people. These desires, however, must be informed by Scripture and not a worldly ideology. Otherwise, there is no hope of treating the pathology that causes the symptoms we see. Further, adopting a worldly ideology will shift our focus away from the gospel, the one thing that all people of all social positions need.