**Wokeism and Christianity**

**Apologetics discussion guide**

**October 6, 2023**

**Collect for the evening:**

Father of the universe and Creator of all worlds, You make the minds of the faithful to be of one will. Grant unto your people that they may love what You command and desire what You promise—both in this world and the next; that among the manifold changes in our world, our hearts may always be fixed on Your Word, where the true joys are to be found; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, Our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever. Amen.

**Why this topic?**

Wokeism is a topic currently in the news, the popular zeitgeist, and academic realms. It addresses several moral and societal issues as well as ideas about appropriate behavior in the public arena. An article in the April 2023 Lutheran Witness by Dr. Adam S. Francisco[[1]](#footnote-1) and three subsequent articles[[2]](#footnote-2) posted on the Witness website, sparked an exploration into this topic. (See the four Francisco articles as a precursor to tonight’s discussion.)

**Scriptural underpinning:**

See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ. –Colossians 2: 8.

We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” –2 Corinthians 10:5.

**Book talk:**

*Christianity and Wokeism: How the Social Justice Movement is Hijacking the Gospel—and the Way to Stop it, by* Owen Strachan, Salem Books*,* Washington, D.C., © 2021.

Strachan is provost and research professor of theology at Grace Bible Theological Seminary and aa senior fellow with the Family Research Council. He earned a PhD in theology from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School and is the author of 20 books.

In *Christianity and Wokeism,* Strachan convincingly argues against the evangelical movement’s joining the crusade for social justice, calling on bewildered parishioners to repent of their supposed guilt for the sins of past generations. He outlines how wokeness is an alternative religion to Christianity, both in its methods and its fruit. He says wokeness is a potent blend of racism, paganism and grievance, encouraging partiality and undermining the unifying work of the Holy Spirit, noting it is not, simply not the Gospel; it is anti-Gospel. Strachan reminds us that God sees people as one human race, not as various races and ethnicities and reviews what both the Old and New Testaments teach about identity and ethnicity. He traces wokeism’s origins and lays out its weaknesses, concluding with the antidote: Christ crucified for you. Strachan includes discussion questions at each chapter’s end, a glossary, suggested additional readings, a thorough bibliography and an index.

**Glossary:[[3]](#footnote-3)**

***Critical Race Theory:*** The system of thought founded by legal scholars such as Richard Delgado and Derrick Bell (circa 1989) which asserts that hidden racism is pervasive throughout society, all whites are racist, blacks (and other minorities) are not racist because they lack the power to be so, and one’s racial group determines one’s core identity; CRT’s solution to the problem of racism is (A) to deconstruct white power and (B) to redistribute power to minorities.

***Microaggression:*** The voicing of a subtle and unintended stereotype (for example, “I don’t see color”) that implies power over ethnic minorities and elicits a negative reaction.

***Racism:*** Historically, this term refers to any unfavorable or hostile attitude harbored by an individual based on a person’s skin color; in woke thought, this term denotes raced-based prejudice against someone *only* when it is coupled with power (that is, prejudice *plus* power). Such that an individual cannot display racism when she is an ethnic minority.

***Social Justice:*** Historically, the phrase refers to broad attempts to fight against unfair inequalities that exist in civic life and to hold unjust perpetrators accountable; in woke thought, this phrase alludes to the twofold practice of deconstructing white power and redistributing power to minorities.

***Systemic Racism:*** Historically, this phrase refers to any explicit and sweeping societal policies that intentionally limit or segregate human beings based on race (for example Jim Crow laws, neighborhood redlining, etc.); in woke thought, this phrase denotes the idea that race-based injustices are secretly embedded in the laws, policies, values, histories, institutions, language and even thought categories created by the dominant white race.

***White Privilege:*** In woke thought, the natural, inborn advantages and benefits that all white people possess simply by virtue of being members of the dominant race.

***White Supremacy:*** Historically, this phrase refers to overt declarations of racial superiority by advocates of race-based segregation, including movements such as the KKK and alt-right pro-Aryan groups; in woke thought, this phrase denotes the unspoken assumption possessed by all white people that they are the ideal race and all other ethnicities are inferior.

***Whiteness:*** In woke thought, the mindset and lived reality of people with Indo-European ancestry and light-colored skin who view themselves, whether consciously or subconsciously, as the superior race and the embodiment of what every human culture should become.

***Wokeness:*** The state of being consciously aware of and “awake” to the hidden, race-based injustices that pervade all of American society; this term has also been expanded to refer to the state of being “awake to injustices that are gender-based, class-based, etc.

**Why this topic?**

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**Background:** Wokeism came out of the academic work related to Critical Race Theory which taught us the terms *systemic racism, implicit bias, whiteness, white privilege, cultural appropriation, colonization, microaggression* and *social justice.* Unfortunately, many evangelical Christians have picked up these ideas as areas the church must explore as we work to fulfill the command to love our neighbors. Many influential evangelical leaders have taken up the mantle that CRT provides a set of analytical tools that explain how race has and continues to function in society and can aid in evaluating a variety of human experiences in a way that, presumably, Scripture cannot. As a result, too many Christian leaders have shifted their messages to social justice while ignoring doctrines addressing original sin, atonement, justification.

For example, CRT theorists have argued that math education is inherently racist, that the very notion of objective truth is rooted in white supremacy and that Western values—moral standards, in particular—are tools of oppression. According to CRT, every aspect of our culture is riddled with racism.[[6]](#footnote-6)

**Questions about the readings?**

**Discussion topics to ponder:**

“Wokeism” in contemporary society means to be aware of oppression and injustice and to work for social justice. According to Francisco, it assumes that “American society is not as free or fair as we think because our institutions and traditional moral and social norms marginalize those who live and think differently from the majority and thereby creates a class of victims in an oppressive society.” Wokeness posits that “all social inequalities (wage gaps, disparities in household incomes, low academic and professional success, etc.) are the result of injustice,” he writes. [[7]](#footnote-7)

**→** What is your initial reaction to this theory of social justice?

**→** Why is this topic important for Christians to understand?

**→** Wokeness strives for equality of outcome not equality of opportunity. What are the hazards of this approach to society’s functioning?

Francisco explains that wokeism takes a relativist position on society, assuming that moral, political and religious standards and institutions are and arbitrary creation of the people in that society, and while they may have served society at one time, there is nothing objective or necessary about them. “They assert that their purpose needs to be reconsidered from the social justice perspective, and if found problematic or oppressive, replaced as society progresses and adopts different standards and other ways of living,” he notes. [[8]](#footnote-8)

**→** Given this understanding, what are the dangers of this worldview to traditional values and societal institutions?

**→** How does reframing what previously has been called deviant behavior into acceptable lifestyles fit into the woke perspective?

**→** What is the risk to Christianity from this worldview?

**→** What do we learn from exploring the foundations and ultimate agenda of woke ideology?

**→** How does comparingmodern-day wokeism to ancient Gnosticism and more-recent Marxism help us understand the heresies of this worldview?

Strachan posits that wokeness affects our spiritual life and how it can infect a Christian’s life. While may be gradual or instantaneous, he reminds us we must be vigilant in watching over our hearts and minds. He lists nine dangers: [[9]](#footnote-9)

1. Wokeness divides us from others—as oppressed or oppressor.
2. Wokeness causes us to despise others.
3. Wokeness leads us to condemn others in pride.
4. Wokeness robs us of joyful peace.
5. Wokeness directs us away from the Gospel.
6. Wokeness makes us bitter.
7. Wokeness makes moving on from wrongs very hard.
8. Wokeness veils God’s providence.
9. Wokeness makes man big and God small.

**→** Do any of these dangers stand out for you? Are there any of which we should be particularly concerned about?

And so, what can we as Bible-believing Christians do? Strachan calls Christians to focus on several priorities: [[10]](#footnote-10)

1. Be a content and unifying member of a local church. Live as if the Gospel creates real unity—because it does.
2. Be salt and light. Fight injustice. Spread the hope of Christ. Befriend others, Show mercy. Extend forgiveness.
3. Stand against woke utopianism. Speak up against wokeness, out of love for those falling prey to this false ideology, by speaking the truth in love.
4. Make the necessary and hard decision to leave a compromised church. But first, speak to the leaders sharing your concerns. Pray for your pastors and leaders that they would turn away from this heresy. If this fails, find a church that preaches and teaches from Scripture and focuses on Christ crucified for the forgiveness of all sins. Choose wisely, Life is to short to sit under unsound doctrine.
5. Protect and help your children resist wokeness. Do all you can to train your children well, protect them, discipline them, help them build a theological worldview and love them.
6. Pray for good to come in the Church and beyond. Pray for the doctrinal health and spiritual vitality of God’s people. Pray for unbelievers. Pray against the spread of wokeness, the devil and all evil. Ask God to save and strengthen His Church to cast down and liberate us from all evil.

**→** Do any of Strachan’s priorities for Christians resonate with you? Do any of them cause you concern?

**→ Summing up, we ask the traditional Lutheran question: What does this mean (and how do we apply this in our lives)?**

1. Francisco, Adam S. “Awake or Woke: The Outline of a Lutheran View,” *Lutheran Witness*, April 2023. St Louis, MO, Concordia Publishing House. <https://witness.lcms.org/2023/awake-or-woke/> accessed Sep 12, 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Francisco, Adam S. “Patterns of Thought in the ‘Woke’ Worldview,” *Lutheran Witness*, May 15, 2023. St Louis, MO, Concordia Publishing House. <https://witness.lcms.org/2023/patterns-of-thought-in-the-woke-worldview/> accessed Sep 12, 2023.

   Francisco--. “The Social Agenda of Woke Ideology, *Lutheran Witness*, June 15, 2023. St. Louis, MO, Concordia Publishing House. <https://witness.lcms.org/2023/the-social-agenda-of-woke-ideology/> accessed Sep 12, 2023.

   Francisco --. A Brief History of the Ideas Behind Wokeism,” *Lutheran Witness*, June 26, 2023. St. Louis, MO, Concordia Publishing House. <https://witness.lcms.org/2023/a-brief-history-of-the-ideas-behind-wokeism/> accessed Sep 12, 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Source for all glossary terms, Strachan, 2021, pp211-213. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Francisco, Adam S. “Awake or Woke: The Outline of a Lutheran View,” *Lutheran Witness*, April 2023. St Louis, MO, Concordia Publishing House. <https://witness.lcms.org/2023/awake-or-woke/> accessed Sep 12, 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Francisco, Adam S. “Patterns of Thought in the ‘Woke’ Worldview,” *Lutheran Witness*, May 15, 2023. St Louis, MO, Concordia Publishing House. <https://witness.lcms.org/2023/patterns-of-thought-in-the-woke-worldview/> accessed Sep 12, 2023.

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6. Strachan, Owen. *Christianity and Wokeism: How the Social Justice Movement is Hijacking the Gospel—and the Way to Stop it.* Washington, D.C., Salem Books, © 2021 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Francisco, Adam S. “Awake or Woke: The Outline of a Lutheran View,” *Lutheran Witness*, April 2023. St Louis, MO, Concordia Publishing House. <https://witness.lcms.org/2023/awake-or-woke/> accessed Sep 12, 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Francisco, Adam S. “Awake or Woke: The Outline of a Lutheran View,” *Lutheran Witness*, April 2023. St Louis, MO, Concordia Publishing House. <https://witness.lcms.org/2023/awake-or-woke/> accessed Sep 12, 2023. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Strachan, Owen. *Christianity and Wokeism: How the Social Justice Movement is Hijacking the Gospel—and the Way to Stop it.* Washington, D.C., Salem Books, © 2021, pp 200-203. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Strachan, Owen. *Christianity and Wokeism: How the Social Justice Movement is Hijacking the Gospel—and the Way to Stop it.* Washington, D.C., Salem Books, © 2021, pp 203-208. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)