The roots of Puritan views in the Reformation battle

This clear delight in marriage and human sexuality as good gifts from God had its roots in the Reformation. The sixteenth-century Reformation is often remembered as a rediscovery of the heart of the gospel and the way of salvation, but it was also a recovery of a biblical view of marriage and sexual intimacy. The mediæval Roman Catholic Church had affirmed the goodness of marriage but at the same time argued that celibacy was a much better option for those wanting to pursue a life of holiness and serve God vocationally. In fact, at the Second Lateran Council (1139), legislation was passed that only those who were celibate were to be ordained. But it was precisely here that reality collided with theological legislation, for many of those who were technically celibate priests in the High and Late Middle Ages were not able to actually live chastely. As Calvin later noted: "Virginity…is an excellent gift; but it is given only to a few."

One of the major scandals of the late mediæval church was thus the very household of the parish priest, who was celibate, but not chaste, his so-called "cook" or "housekeeper" actually serving as his concubine. Little wonder that Calvin regarded the Roman Catholic requirement of the celibacy of its priests as "a modern tyranny" and "doctrine of devils." Calvin's language, while strident, is not at all out of place. Sexuality has been and still is a major battlefield in the struggle for purity and holiness. And Calvin, wishing to take his guidance above all from the Scriptures, rightly saw the mediæval Church's position as both out of sync with the Bible and a doorway to sexual scandal.

As was the era of the Reformation, so ours is a day in which there is an enormous battle over sexuality and sexual expression. And if the modern Church is to be wise, she must cleave to the ancient paths laid down in God's Word. B

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WOKENESS AND CHRISTIANITY (PART 2)

BY OWEN PIKKERT ›› In the last issue of *Barnabas*, I described wokeness as having much of its theoretical basis in Marxism. To review: classical Marxism holds (1) people can be divided into oppressors and oppressed; (2) the oppressors have brainwashed most of the oppressed into complacency; (3) the oppressed need to be made more aware of their oppression; (4) such awareness ought to lead to revolution; (5) who counts as oppressor or oppressed is determined by economic class. I argued that wokeness keeps the first four claims and extends the fifth by adding many other groups to the list of oppressed: women, ethnic minorities, sexual minorities, the colonized, the physically disabled, those with mental health issues, and so on. It then advocates a variety of practical ways in which the newly defined oppressed can be liberated. These include aggressive affirmative action programs, increased media representation, land acknowledgments, calls for reparations, etc.

In this article, I want to further examine whether the theoretical basis of wokeness is compatible with Christianity. I will argue that, despite one area of compatibility, wokeness and Christianity are at odds over at least two fundamental issues.

1. A compatibility: a recognition of unfair disadvantages

The one area of compatibility that I have in mind concerns some efforts of woke scholarship. Such scholarship examines the various ways in which people can face unobvious, unfair disadvantages due to overlapping identities. By "identities" I simply mean factors such as one's race, gender, and so forth. Some of the most influential work in this area is that of Kimberlé Crenshaw, an African-American legal scholar at UCLA and Columbia. In a very influential paper, Crenshaw analyzes a variety of legal cases in which the plaintiff was legally handicapped by the fact that she was both black and a woman. For example, in the case of *Degraffenreid v. General Motors* (1976), Degraffenreid, a black woman, claimed that General Motors discriminated against black women in their hiring practices. The court decided that, as a matter of law, Degraffenreid could only file a complaint that GM was discriminating against women, or that GM was discriminating against black people—but not both. This hamstrung Degraffenreid's case because, on the former, GM could point out that plenty of white women were hired and, on the latter, that plenty of black men were hired. One can sympathize with Degraffenreid at being forced into a legal dilemma that neither represented her original concern nor allowed her to win.

Now it is both easy and common to make all sorts of fallacious generalizations based on examples such as this. Does this mean that all those with overlapping marginalized identities are automatically disadvantaged? Well, even if that was true in the past, there are some black women today who face considerable advantages from scholarships and hiring quotas. Does this mean that all those with overlapping non-marginalized identities are automatically guilty? Well, there have been plenty of sexist and racist white men, but it seems perverse to start imputing guilt on all white men past and present. Despite such abuses, however, it is still worth considering cases such as those analyzed by Crenshaw, and why one never had to consider them before. Perhaps it is because one took some advantages for granted.

One of the chief incompatibilities of wokeness with Christianity concerns human nature.

2. An incompatibility: views on human nature

Despite the usefulness of some woke scholarship, however, much of the theoretical basis of wokeness is deeply incompatible with Christianity. One of the chief incompatibilities concerns *human nature*. According to Christianity, human nature is depraved. "The heart is deceitful above all things", writes Jeremiah, "and desperately sick" (Jeremiah 17:9). Although some of the woke might agree that such an assessment is accurate of *some* people, they cannot truly claim that this is true of *all* persons from birth. This is because the woke

typically deny the existence of any objective human nature at all, instead viewing it as culturally constructed. Human nature, they might suggest, is like clothing: it exists, but it comes in many versions, which are all human creations that reflect specific cultural contexts and values. It is therefore not surprising that clothing varies considerably from one culture to another. You are not born wearing clothes; rather, you are born into a culture that offers you its clothing. You are born just as naked in Fiji as in Finland, but your sartorial choices will probably focus more on T-shirts in the former and sweaters in the latter. And that's just the point: because no one is born wearing a T-shirt or a sweater, it's really just a matter of choice. You might feel a little warm wearing a sweater in Fiji—but hey, you do *you*.

The same is allegedly true of human nature. Nobody is born with a depraved nature, say the woke, because nobody is born with a nature at all. Rather, *you choose your own nature from a variety of culturally constructed options*, and those who claim otherwise are simply making a factual mistake. To say things like "everyone is born depraved" or "don't underestimate how depraved you really are" is just like a Finn saying, "Everyone is born a sweater-person" or "Don't underestimate how sweaterish you really are." Such talk simply reveals the Finn's parochialism. For the Christian, however, human nature and clothing are not analogous. One does not choose depravity as one option among many; rather, *one is born depraved, and it is only by God's grace that this problem can ultimately be solved.*

3. Another incompatibility: views on liberation

One of the most wonderful of theological facts is that, through Christ, one can be liberated from sin. Paul puts the matter succinctly: "You have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God" (Romans 6:22). The Christian is now completely free from the *penalty* of sin, and increasingly free from the *power* of sin. But notice that such newfound freedom does not imply that one can do whatever one wants. Quite the contrary: although Christians have been liberated from one master, they are now subject to a much better one. Of course, the Bible also uses other images to describe our new relationship to God. Later on in Romans, for instance, Paul describes us as adopted sons and heirs (8:15–17). But we are still slaves, and as such do not have the right to do as we please. We are instead bound by our Master's will.

Such unlimited liberation is not simply a stepping-stone to some end goal: it *is* the end goal itself.

Now there is obviously much about this that the woke will reject. They will probably deny the historical and theological facts that make such liberation possible, and the appropriateness of using slavery as a metaphor in any context. But I wish to focus on a difference concerning the *type* of liberation at stake. The liberation that Paul endorses is *limited and instrumental*. By "limited" I mean that while Paul endorses liberation from sin, he does not endorse complete liberation to do as one wants. By "instrumental" I mean that Paul takes liberation from sin to be for the sake of a greater goal, namely the glorification of God—a glorification that presupposes that we have become slaves to him.

The liberation that the woke endorse, by contrast, is *unlimited and ultimate*. By "unlimited" I mean that the woke typically think that one should be liberated from anything that opposes the creation and expression of one's preferred identity, so long as one does not harm others in the process. By "ultimate" I mean that such unlimited liberation is not simply a stepping-stone to some end goal: it *is* the end goal itself. The woke utopia is one where each person is fully affirmed in whichever identity they have chosen to construct. This is totally opposed to the Christian vision of persons submitted to the will of God, a submission which often requires a great deal of self-denial. I emphasize that such self-denial is worth it, being ultimately swamped by "an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison" (2 Corinthians 4:17). But it is self-denial nonetheless, not full liberation to live and identify however one pleases. B

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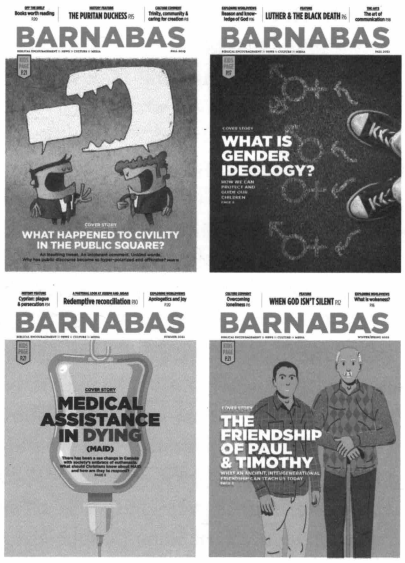

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