

A Theological and Philosophical Critique of the Woke Worldview: Insights from Marian Spirituality and Ecological Theology.

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Abstract:

This article offers a critical theological and philosophical engagement with the contemporary woke worldview, assessing its aspirations for justice, inclusion, and equity through the lens of Marian spirituality and ecological theology. While acknowledging the noble intentions underlying woke consciousness, the paper explores how its anthropological assumptions and expressions of justice often diverge from Christian understandings of grace, dignity, and creation. Drawing from the life of Mary and the integrative vision of ecological theology, the article proposes a more holistic alternative—one that transcends ideological polarities and invites renewed commitment to cosmic solidarity, divine love, and spiritual humility. This synthesis seeks to recover the Church's rich wisdom tradition as a constructive response to cultural fragmentation, affirming truth without forfeiting compassion.

Keywords: Woke worldview; Marian spirituality; ecological theology; Christian anthropology; divine justice and solidarity

Introduction

While rooted in laudable goals—such as promoting equity, compassion, and recognition of historically marginalized groups—the woke worldview often generates complex tensions within theological and philosophical frameworks. It has

stimulated widespread debates across the public square, religious institutions, and academic disciplines. From a Christian theological standpoint, particularly when viewed through the lens of Marian spirituality and ecological theology, the woke ethos presents both powerful resonances and important points of caution. This chapter seeks to engage this cultural moment with intellectual rigor, spiritual depth, and theological discernment—highlighting how Mary, the Mother of God, and the tradition of ecological theology offer a more integrative vision of justice, human dignity, and the sacredness of creation.

The following analysis explores the philosophical and theological underpinnings of the woke worldview, examines its anthropological assumptions, and evaluates its expressions of justice through the framework of Christian thought. It highlights how Marian spirituality and ecological theology provide alternative paradigms of transformation—rooted not in individual assertion or ideological struggle, but in divine grace, cosmic solidarity, and redemptive love. In a world increasingly marked by ideological polarization, moral absolutism, and cultural fragmentation, this essay aims to retrieve the wisdom of the Christian tradition as a path toward unity, mercy, and renewal.

Ultimately, the goal is not to dismiss or diminish the concerns raised by woke consciousness but to engage them through a theological lens that upholds both truth and compassion. As Pope Francis (2020) reminds us in *Fratelli Tutti*, authentic social change must be grounded in a vision of fraternity, solidarity, and transcendent dignity. In this light, Mary's fiat and the Church's ecological witness invite us into a renewed understanding of justice—one shaped not merely by human activism, but by divine love enfolded in history and creation.

Awake, Not Woke: Understanding 'Woke'

In contemporary discourse, the term "woke" has emerged as a potent cultural marker, often symbolizing a heightened sensitivity to issues of justice, marginalization, and identity. Originating in African American Vernacular English (AAVE), "woke" initially denoted an awakened awareness of racial injustice, urging vigilance against systemic discrimination (Merriam-Webster, 2023). Over time, however, the term has been broadened, politicized, and, in some quarters, weaponized—becoming both a badge of honor and a target of critique. It now extends to concerns involving gender, sexuality, colonial history, environmental degradation, and intersectional justice.

At its best, the woke impulse represents a longing for justice and inclusion. It calls attention to the structural inequalities that pervade societies and demands moral accountability from individuals, institutions, and traditions. In this sense, it resonates deeply with the Christian conviction that all people are made in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:27). Liberation theologians such as Gustavo Gutiérrez (1973) argue that genuine faith must involve a preferential option for the poor and a commitment to transformative justice. The call to awaken to injustice is therefore not foreign to Christian spirituality; rather, it finds deep continuity within biblical prophecy and social doctrine.

However, the contemporary woke ethos, especially in its secularized form, often reflects a truncated anthropology. When human dignity is defined primarily by sociopolitical categories or identity constructs, and when truth is reduced to personal experience or communal narratives, a tension arises with the Christian understanding of the human person. As Pope Benedict XVI (2007) warned in *Spe Salvi*, "a world without God is a world without hope" (§23). Detached from a transcendent horizon, the pursuit of justice can devolve into ideological rigidity, moral absolutism, and polarization. In such a

framework, disagreement is often equated with harm, and correction becomes synonymous with erasure—a pattern starkly observed in cancel culture.

The woke worldview frequently assumes a prophetic posture: naming harm, exposing complicity, and demanding reform. This mirrors the role of the biblical prophets who denounced injustice and called communities to repentance. Yet Christian prophecy is always married to penance, mercy, and redemption. The symbol of ultimate transformation in Christianity is not cultural critique or social denunciation, but the Cross. Mary at the foot of the Cross (John 19:25-27) embodies this mystery: justice is born not from outrage, but from suffering love, enduring hope, and radical receptivity to God's will.

A Marian theological anthropology offers a counter-vision to the assertive individualism and reactive ethos that sometimes characterizes the woke movement. Mary's fiat (Luke 1:38) is an act not of self-assertion but of radical surrender and divine collaboration. Her humility, attentiveness, and generative obedience stand in contrast to a culture often driven by outrage, entitlement, and performative virtue. As Balthasar (1988) notes, Mary's personhood is not diminished by her receptivity; rather, it is fulfilled in self-gift and participation in God's redemptive plan.

Ecclesially, the Church is called to engage the woke world not with disdain or fear, but with discerning compassion. Pope Francis (2015), in *Laudato Si'*, emphasizes the need for integral ecology—a vision that links social, spiritual, and environmental justice. This holistic approach resists ideological reductionism and reclaims a sacred vision of creation and community. Mary, as "terra nova" or "new earth," becomes an icon of this restored harmony between humanity and the cosmos (Boff, 2009).

Ultimately, a theology that is awake but not merely woke will remain rooted in divine grace, oriented toward the dignity of every person, and open to the mystery of God's redemptive

action in history. It will call out injustice without abandoning mercy, and it will proclaim truth without forfeiting love. In Mary, the Mother of God, the Church discovers not only an intercessor but a prophetic witness to the justice and peace that flow from God's heart.

Exploring the Characteristics of the "Woke World"

The term "woke" has evolved into a cultural phenomenon, symbolizing a heightened awareness of social justice issues and a call for transformative action in addressing inequities. While often misunderstood or criticized, the characteristics associated with a "woke world" reflect an era of deepening sensitivity to systemic injustices, identity, and the interconnectedness of human struggles. Below, we explore these traits in detail, expanding the wisdom within each concept to understand its broader implications for society today.

1. Heightened Social Awareness

Recognition of Inequities

One of the most defining characteristics of the "woke world" is the growing consciousness around systemic injustices. From racial discrimination to economic oppression, people are increasingly aware of how historical and structural inequities shape contemporary realities. This recognition has encouraged society to confront uncomfortable truths, such as wealth disparities, police brutality, and gender inequality, fostering a collective call for justice (Crenshaw, 1989). The heightened awareness of inequities is not merely a trend but a profound shift toward acknowledging the interconnected suffering of marginalized communities.

Intersectionality

At the heart of this awareness is the concept of intersectionality, introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989). Intersectionality highlights how various forms of oppression—such as racism,

sexism, ableism, and classism—overlap and amplify one another. For example, a Black woman may face discrimination that is distinct from what a white woman or a Black man might experience. This framework urges society to examine justice through a multidimensional lens, ensuring that solutions address the complexity of oppression rather than focusing on singular forms of injustice.

2. Inclusive Language and Representation

Language Sensitivity

In a "woke world," language is seen as a powerful force with the ability to include or exclude. Increased attention to pronoun usage, gender-neutral terms, and the avoidance of derogatory slurs reflects a desire to affirm the dignity of all identities. This language sensitivity is not about political correctness but about fostering respect and inclusion, particularly for historically marginalized groups such as nonbinary individuals and those with disabilities.

Diverse Representation

Representation matters, and advocacy for the visibility of marginalized voices has become a cornerstone of this movement. In media, literature, politics, and leadership, there is a growing demand for diverse perspectives that challenge traditional norms. For example, the rise of Black, queer, feminist, and Indigenous authors in mainstream publishing has helped reshape cultural narratives. Similarly, the push for diversity in corporate boardrooms and government institutions seeks to dismantle the barriers that have historically excluded underrepresented groups.

3. Cultural and Historical Reevaluation

Deconstruction of Narratives

The "woke world" seeks to reexamine historical narratives that have long been dominated by colonial, patriarchal, or Eurocentric perspectives. This includes questioning the glorification of historical figures who contributed to oppression, such as slave owners or imperialists, and acknowledging the voices of those who were silenced. For example, movements to remove Confederate statues in the United States or to rename institutions tied to colonial legacies reflect a broader effort to confront history with honesty and justice.

Cancel Culture

One controversial aspect of this reevaluation is cancel culture, which involves holding individuals, brands, or institutions accountable for harmful behavior or rhetoric. Critics argue it can lead to overreach or mob-like behavior, but proponents see it as a form of public justice. Cancel culture underscores the demand for accountability in an age where power dynamics can no longer shield harmful actions from scrutiny.

4. Emphasis on Identity and Lived Experience

Authenticity of Experience

A defining feature of the "woke" era is the valuing of personal and community narratives, especially those of historically marginalized groups. Lived experiences—whether of racism, sexism, or homophobia—are seen as authentic sources of knowledge that challenge dominant frameworks. These narratives provide a human face to systemic issues, fostering empathy and understanding in ways that abstract theories cannot.

Safe Spaces and Trauma Awareness

The focus on mental health and trauma-informed practices reflects a growing recognition of the emotional toll of systemic oppression. Schools, workplaces, and communities are increasingly adopting policies to create safe spaces, where individuals can share their experiences without fear of judgment or harm. This focus on emotional safety is particularly crucial in addressing intergenerational trauma, such as the effects of colonization, slavery, or forced displacement.

5. Environmental and Planetary Consciousness

Climate Justice

Environmental concerns are no longer framed solely as scientific or economic issues but as matters of justice. Climate justice emphasizes the disproportionate impact of climate change on vulnerable communities, such as small island nations, Indigenous peoples, and low-income populations. This perspective calls for solutions that center on equity, ensuring that those least responsible for environmental degradation are not the most affected by its consequences (Pope Francis, 2015).

Sustainable Living

The rise of sustainable lifestyles—such as plant-based diets, ethical consumption, and zero-waste movements—reflects a shift in societal values. These practices are not only environmentally friendly but also rooted in a deeper ethical commitment to reducing harm to animals, people, and the planet. For example, the popularity of fast fashion alternatives and local, sustainable agriculture demonstrates a growing desire to align personal choices with ecological responsibility.

6. Digital Activism and Instant Connectivity

Social Media Advocacy

Social media platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok have become powerful tools for activism, spreading awareness, and organizing movements. For example, hashtags like #BlackLivesMatter, #MeToo, and #FridaysForFuture have mobilized millions of people worldwide. Digital activism allows historically marginalized voices to bypass traditional gatekeepers, creating spaces for grassroots organizing and global solidarity.

Viral Mobilization

The speed at which social media can disseminate information has enabled rapid mobilization around social justice causes. Viral campaigns have catalyzed protests, raised funds, and pressured institutions to change policies. However, this instant connectivity also raises questions about the sustainability of digital activism and the risks of performative allyship—engaging in activism for appearances rather than genuine commitment.

7. Moral Sensibility and Ethical Consumerism

Ethical Awareness

Consumers are increasingly concerned with the origins of the products they buy, from the working conditions of laborers to the environmental impact of production processes. This moral sensibility reflects a shift toward ethical consumerism, where purchasing decisions are guided by values rather than convenience.

Boycotts and Buycotts

Movements to boycott unethical companies and support socially responsible brands have gained momentum. For example, campaigns to avoid companies linked to

environmental destruction or exploitative labor practices demonstrate the growing power of consumer activism. Conversely, boycotts encourage people to support businesses that align with values such as sustainability, diversity, and fair trade.

8. Global Solidarity and Cosmopolitanism

Transnational Empathy

The "woke world" fosters a sense of transnational empathy, where people identify with struggles beyond their national borders. From solidarity with Palestinian rights to support for refugees fleeing war and persecution, this global consciousness reflects an understanding that justice is universal. This interconnectedness is often amplified by digital activism, which makes global struggles more visible and accessible.

Decolonization

Efforts to dismantle colonial legacies in education, museum curation, theology, and international aid reflect a broader commitment to justice. Decolonization involves not only recognizing the harm caused by imperialism but also amplifying Indigenous voices, restoring cultural heritage, and rethinking power dynamics in global relations. For example, the return of looted artifacts from European museums to African nations is a tangible step toward restoring dignity and addressing historical injustices (Achebe, 2012).

Therefore, the characteristics associated with today's so-called "woke world" reflect a profound shift in societal values. From the recognition of systemic injustices to the embrace of intersectionality, inclusive language, and environmental consciousness, these traits highlight a collective yearning for justice, equity, and sustainability. While these movements are not without controversy, they represent an ongoing effort to create a world that values empathy, accountability, and solidarity. By embracing these principles, society can move

closer to a future where dignity, justice, and care for creation are at the heart of human action.

The Woke Impulse and the Imago Dei

At its best, the woke impulse reflects a profound sensitivity to the dignity of every human person—echoing the biblical teaching that all are made in the image and likeness of God (Genesis 1:27). This foundational belief undergirds Christian affirmations of human rights, justice, and solidarity. Liberation theologians such as Gustavo Gutiérrez have long argued that authentic faith requires a preferential option for the poor and oppressed (Gutiérrez, 1973). In this way, the woke world's commitment to uplifting marginalized voices parallels the Church's mission to embody Christ's healing presence in history.

Furthermore, contemporary thinkers like Cornel West and bell hooks have drawn on spiritual and ethical traditions to champion love, community, and justice as central to the human vocation. Their insights mirror the biblical command to love one's neighbor and resist structures of domination. From this perspective, the woke worldview can serve as a prophetic reminder to the Church of its responsibility to incarnate justice as an extension of God's reign on earth.

However, when untethered from a theocentric and transcendent vision, the woke ethos risks reducing human dignity to sociological constructs or identity categories alone. The danger here is anthropocentrism unmoored from the divine—a worldview in which the human becomes the sole arbiter of morality, justice, and truth. As Pope Benedict XVI cautioned, "a world without God is a world without hope" (*Spe Salvi*, 2007, §23). Wokeness, in its more secularized expressions, often resists any metanarrative that transcends individual experience or subjective truth, leading to relativism and moral fragmentation.

Philosopher Charles Taylor, in his seminal work *A Secular Age* (2007), warns of the "buffered self"—an individualistic anthropology that seeks meaning apart from transcendence. This dynamic often characterizes the modern identity politics of wokeness, where personhood is constructed primarily through self-definition rather than divine reflection. Without anchoring human identity in the *Imago Dei*, the pursuit of justice risks devolving into performative virtue signaling or ideological tribalism.

Moreover, critiques of power in woke discourse can overlook the theological insight that power, when purified by love, becomes a force for service and communion rather than control. In the absence of grace and forgiveness, the call-out culture associated with wokeness may foster social fragmentation rather than reconciliation. The Christian tradition, by contrast, proclaims the power of mercy, repentance, and conversion—pathways toward genuine liberation and healing.

Marian Spirituality: A Countercultural Vision

Mary, the Mother of God, offers a radically different anthropology—one rooted in receptivity, humility, and cosmic solidarity. Her fiat (Luke 1:38), an act of profound surrender to divine initiative, contrasts sharply with a worldview predicated on self-assertion, autonomy, and individual entitlement. In Marian spirituality, power is redefined not as domination or self-expression but as generative self-gift and participation in God's redemptive love. Mary exemplifies a countercultural witness in which the highest form of human action is receptivity to grace rather than the assertion of self-will.

Her way of being stands in contrast to a cultural moment that frequently prizes autonomy above all. Yet, in Mary, we see a vision of the human person as deeply relational—dependent upon God and radically open to others. As Hans Urs von Balthasar (1987) has written, Mary is the archetype of the Church precisely because she receives and responds, not

because she seizes and constructs. This Marian disposition reveals a deeply theological anthropology: to be human is to say yes to God and neighbor, not simply to affirm oneself.

Mary's Magnificat (Luke 1:46–55) powerfully affirms social and spiritual justice. It critiques systems of oppression and uplifts the lowly—resonating with many values dear to the woke movement. However, her critique is always theocentric: it is God who scatters the proud and exalts the humble. The locus of transformation is divine action, not merely human revolution. The Magnificat avoids the extremes of despair and utopianism by locating hope in the mercy and fidelity of God. This Christocentric and Marian approach offers a corrective to the activist tendencies within the woke ethos that can verge on ideological absolutism or moralism devoid of grace.

Furthermore, Mary's strength lies in her maternal intercession and kenotic humility. Her influence in salvation history is not by coercion but by faithful presence and spiritual depth. In a culture tempted by performative activism, Mary offers a model of sustained, interior commitment to justice—formed not in public performance but in silent fidelity. As Adrienne von Speyr (2004) suggests, Mary's interior life radiates outward into cosmic solidarity, making her the true mother of all creations.

Ecological Theology and Woke Environmentalism

Ecological theology, especially as articulated in *Laudato Si'* (Pope Francis, 2015), shares with the woke worldview a profound concern for the Earth and vulnerable communities. Pope Francis calls for an "integral ecology" that unites environmental, social, and spiritual concerns (LS §137). This approach challenges the often-anthropocentric tendencies in woke activism, which may reduce ecology to another battleground for political ideology rather than a sacred relationship between creation and Creator.

Mary, in this ecological vision, emerges as *terra nova*—the new earth, in whom justice dwells. Her contemplative posture and maternal care symbolize a mode of ecological stewardship rooted in awe, gratitude, and interdependence. Ecofeminist theologians such as Ivone Gebara have highlighted Mary's capacity to reveal a relational, non-violent, and nurturing model of engagement with the natural world (Gebara, 1999). In this light, Marian ecology stands in critical solidarity with woke environmentalism: affirming its concerns while grounding them in a transcendent vision of cosmic harmony.

Moreover, Marian ecological spirituality models an antidote to consumerism and technocratic domination—forces that often underlie environmental degradation. Mary's simplicity, attentiveness to the rhythms of life, and capacity to nurture within the finite realm of the body, echo the values of restraint and reverence needed for ecological renewal. As theologian Sallie McFague (2008) notes, ecological wholeness requires "a shift from egocentric to theocentric models of care," a shift exemplified by Mary's vocation.

Mary's embodiment of the new creation anticipates the eschatological healing of all creation. Her Assumption into heaven affirms not only the dignity of the human body but also its cosmic destiny in Christ. In her glorified state, Mary intercedes for the groaning Earth (Romans 8:22), offering hope that ecological crisis is not the end, but the birth pang of renewal.

Identity, Community, and Ecclesial Communion

The emphasis on identity in woke culture—whether racial, gendered, or cultural—can enrich theological anthropology by unveiling the beauty of God's diverse creation. Yet when identity becomes the primary locus of moral authority or communal belonging, it may fragment the Church's call to catholicity (universal communion). As St. Paul reminds us, "there is

neither Jew nor Greek... for all are one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

Mary, as Mother of the Church, embodies this unity-in-diversity. She is venerated across cultures and traditions, not because she conforms to every cultural expression but because she points beyond them to the universal call to holiness. In this way, Marian spirituality critiques the tribalism that sometimes marks woke discourse and offers instead a vision of reconciled difference grounded in love and mutual respect.

Marian iconography across global Christianity—be it Our Lady of Guadalupe, the Black Madonna, or Our Lady of China—underscores the transcultural and transhistorical relevance of Mary. She invites each culture to see itself within the salvific narrative of Christ while transcending the reduction of identity to politics or race. Her motherhood becomes a locus of healing across boundaries, drawing diverse identities into communion without erasure.

The Prophetic and the Penitential

Surely, the woke worldview often functions in a prophetic mode—calling out injustice, naming harm, and demanding reform. This impulse finds strong resonance in the biblical tradition of the prophets, who were unafraid to denounce oppression and advocate for the voiceless (Isaiah 1:17; Amos 5:24). Like Jeremiah or Micah, the woke movement seeks to unmask systemic sin and provoke a moral reckoning. However, biblical prophecy is never merely denunciatory; it is always oriented toward the possibility of conversion, healing, and reconciliation (Brueggemann, 2001).

Christian prophecy, unlike contemporary cancel culture, is inseparable from penance, forgiveness, and the hope of redemption. The Cross, not the crowd, is the ultimate site of judgment and mercy. At the foot of the Cross stands Mary, whose silent fidelity bears witness to the paradox of justice

fulfilled through suffering love. In her, we see the true heart of prophecy—not as moral outrage alone, but as maternal accompaniment and enduring intercession.

Cancel culture, in contrast, often lacks the redemptive arc essential to Christian hope. It tends to freeze individuals in their worst moments, denying the transformative grace that faith affirms as central to human dignity. As Miroslav Volf (1996) argues, forgiveness is not the erasure of justice but its fulfillment through the embrace of the other. Mary models this paradox: her sorrow at Calvary does not lead to resentment but to hope and solidarity.

A Marian and ecological theology invites the Church to engage the woke world not with fear or disdain, but with discernment, compassion, and confidence in the Gospel's transforming power. It calls us to uphold justice without abandoning grace, to listen deeply without forfeiting truth, and to build a more just world through the pattern of Christ and His Mother—whose quiet fiat continues to echo across time and culture as the beginning of a new creation. In this mode of Marian engagement, the Church becomes not a reactive institution, but a proactive witness to a justice rooted in love, a truth infused with mercy, and a hope resilient enough to transform the world.

Conclusion

In an age shaped by the urgency of justice, the intensity of identity politics, and the global cry for ecological healing, Marian spirituality offers a still point in the turning world. Her fiat was not an escape from history but a revolutionary openness to divine action within it—a yes that continues to ripple through creation. The woke worldview, with its insistence on equity, awareness, and reform, finds echoes in her Magnificat, yet it also needs her humility, her receptivity, and her anchoring in transcendence.

Ecological theology reminds us that justice is not merely a human construction but a cosmic harmony, a right ordering of all things in God. Mary, as the first disciple and the mother of the new creation, embodies this harmony. She sings not only for the poor and marginalized but for the groaning Earth, offering a model of justice that is tender, incarnational, and full of grace.

If the woke world seeks to repair what has been broken, Marian ecological theology invites us to do so not merely through critique, but through communion. It asks us to move from outrage to intercession, from fragmentation to wholeness, from self-assertion to self-gift. In her, we find a vision of justice that is neither triumphalist nor despairing, but profoundly hopeful—a justice that flows not from the will to power, but from the heart of God.

Let the Church, then, speak to the age not in reaction or retreat, but with the courage of Mary—bearing Christ to the world with a justice that heals, a mercy that restores, and a hope that renews all creation.

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