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WOKE CULTURE IN CANADA? ANTHROPOLOGICAL ERRORS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR MISSION

Abstract. With the recent emergence of the so-called “woke culture” in North America and Europe, and given the wide variety of ways “woke” has been interpreted by Christians, this paper begins by defining “woke culture” through the lens of anthropology: what is “woke culture” and what does it presuppose about the meaning of being human? The paper argues that “woke culture” carries within it the seeds of an anthropological error: it ignores the original evidence of the givenness of an embodied identity, including both the inherent meaningfulness of having received one’s body from another, and the significance of its sexual differentiation as male or female. A reduced understanding of human freedom as pure “self-making” also follows. By contrast, Pope John Paul II presents an adequate anthropology by placing embodied human experience at its center. Taking Canada as a case study for “woke culture,” examples from the three fundamental anthropological categories of birth, love (sexual difference) and death are discussed. In the face of the great confusion generated by this new category of “woke,” assessing its anthropological foundations prepares those who are engaged in Catholic education or pastoral work to respond adequately to the challenges it brings. The paper invites both a critical reading of woke culture, and a fearless creativity to be present within it.

Keywords: Woke culture; Canada; Justin Trudeau; new rights; George Grant; Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms; John Paul II; theological anthropology.

The readings from the liturgy leading up to the recent celebration of the feast of Christ the King carried the message of warning: Beware! Watch out for false idols, false gods, and of forgetting your Creator! Being invited to reflect on certain worrisome trends in Canadian culture at a conference dedicated to the anthropology of Saint Pope John Paul II, the prophet Daniel comes easily to mind, who had the vocation to warn King Nebuchadnezzar of the falsity of his ways by interpreting the writing on the wall.

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Mene, mene, takel, parsin (Dan 5:25). It is in this spirit of attempting to interpret certain signs in Canadian culture, it's so called "anthropological" writing on the wall, that I offer my presentation this afternoon. I do not claim to have the prophetic gifts of Daniel! The decision to offer a panorama of our cultural "the writing on the wall" necessitates that the theological and ontological reflections will remain somewhat superficial. This brief presentation will also of necessity leave out important elements of Canadian culture. Given these constraints, what can be gained from such an analysis? "Now more than ever the world needs to rediscover the meaning and value of the human being in relation to the challenges we face," said Pope Francis in a recent message to the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Culture which had as its theme *Rethinking Anthropology – A Necessary Humanism*.¹ In front of the challenges we face due to a movement popularly referred to as "woke" culture or the culture of the "new rights,"² it is timely to explore the anthropological basis of this cultural proposal- what does it tell us about being human? We feel compelled and responsible to engage with this new paradigm of meaning and put it in dialogue with biblical anthropology following the groundwork prepared for us by the previous pontificates and the Second Vatican Council.

We live in a "cancel culture" that thrives on finger pointing and condemnation, however this paper is not offered in this spirit. The aim of assessing what is being called Canada's "anthropological error" is not principally to condemn the culture but to offer clarity where there is confusion, and hope where there is fear. Of course, the Holy Spirit has been given to us to "convince the world of sin." However, as John Paul II wisely pointed out, the purpose of this convincing the world of sin is not to condemn the world, but so that the Church "can demonstrate that evil can be overcome if we open ourselves" to the love of God.³ The aim of pointing out errors

¹ Pope Francis, "Video Message of the Holy Father to mark the conclusion of the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Culture," Holy See, accessed December 12, 2021. <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2021/documents/20211123-videomessaggioplenaria-pcc.html>.

² We are using the term the "new rights" in the sense accorded to the term by Fr. Julian Carron and others who see the rise of a rights reflecting a new anthropology being codified in Western democratic countries. See Julian Carron, *Disarming Beauty Essays on Faith, Truth, and Freedom* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007) and Marta Cartabia, "The Challenges of 'New Rights' and Militant Secularism, Universal Rights in a World of Diversity. The Case of Religious Freedom," Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, Acta 17, 2012, accessed December 14, 2021, <http://www.pass.va/content/dam/scienze-sociali/pdf/acta17/acta17-cartabia.pdf>.

³ Pope John Paul II, *Memory and Identity: Conversations at the Dawn of a Millennium* (New York: Rizzoli, 2005), 7.

and ideologies is above all pastoral: to help people encounter the living God, as did the prophet Daniel, and in so doing, discover their identity as sons and daughters of God.

Our approach as a Church to “woke” culture and to the plethora of “new rights” must be approached concurrently on two mutual fronts. The first is the front of ideas- the need to name and clarify the new anthropological paradigm. The second is the front of our cultural presence- what does Christ ask of us in this culture? What sort of witness of required by Christians? This two-fold method suggests itself indeed by the Incarnation, where the Word become flesh, where the Word became a Presence. Christianity holds together the tension between ideas and life, and we are responsible for both. Pope Francis echoed this sentiment in his above-mentioned message: “Today, a revolution is underway — yes, a revolution,” writes Pope Francis, “— that is touching the essential nodes of human existence and requires a creative effort of thought and action. Both of them.” What sort of creative thought and action are asked of us Catholics in front of this so called “woke culture”?

The aim in this paper is to offer a brief diagnosis Canada’s anthropological error vis-a-vis “woke culture” and to offer insights of a pastoral nature for how Christians can embody our mission in these unique circumstances. Following Pope Francis’ indication, this paper will address both the ideas underlying this culture and suggest creative actions for witnessing to our faith within it.

We will begin by clarifying why wokeness is popularly attributed to Canada, and in so doing, clarify what is meant by “woke.” We will then look at the definition of culture in Pope John Paul II’s encyclical *Centesimus Annus* which will provide us the lens through which we will then look at examples from Canadian culture that express this previously defined notion of woke. This exploration of certain manifestations of what I will be calling Canada’s “anthropological error” will be the heart of the paper: how have the fundamental human experiences of birth, love and sexual difference, and death been transformed by an understanding of so-called “new rights” embodied in woke culture? By way of conclusion, we will offer insights about Christian presence in such a culture.⁴

⁴ We have made the decision to not include in this discussion Canada’s and the Canadian Catholic Church’s reckoning with the history of the Indian Residential schools. Although it is very relevant, it seemed too large and sensitive an issue to try to discuss in this short paper. For more information, please see the work of Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission: <https://nctr.ca/>

As the director of a diocesan Centre for Marriage, Life and Family in the secular city of Montreal, and a professor and member for the formation team at our diocesan seminary, I would be remiss if I did not share the reasons for my hope in front of this culture. It is not a hope based in our capacity to wholly correct the “anthropological error,” and reverse political and legal decisions. It is Christ’s presence in the Church and in the communion of believers, that continues to encounter men and women of today that gives me hope for tomorrow.

IS CANADA WOKE?

Is Canada a quintessentially “woke” country? On my own reading of Canadian culture and politics, my immediate answer was no. I did not see the signs of what I thought was a particularly American phenomenon. However, to expand my horizons, I approached colleagues and friends who teach at Canadian universities as well as recent graduates to ask them about woke culture, for it is well known for its manifestation in universities. “What is woke culture? Do you see this at your school? Where so you see wokeness in politics?,” I asked them. As it turns out the majority of people had a very vague notion of the meaning of “woke.” There was a general sense that it had to do with political correctness, sensitivity to social justice issues, and the Black Lives Matter movement. In general, most people who were familiar with its meaning though it was more an issue in the United States and in the world of social media.

Next, I turned toward social media to seek to better understand this perceived connection between Canada and wokeness. To my surprise, a quick search of the terms “Canada” and “woke” led me to a plethora of search results from mostly British and American newspapers and magazines associating Canada with wokeness. Not Canada in general, but specifically linking our Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, to a culture of “wokeness.” Here are some of the headlines which have captured the attention of an international audience over the past few years: “Justin Trudeau is the King of Woke,”⁵ “Justin

records/reports/, accessed December 14, 2021. See also the statements of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops regarding the Indian Residential Schools, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://www.cccb.ca/indigenous-peoples/indian-residential-schools-and-trc/>.

⁵ Michael Tobe, “Justin Trudeau is the King of Woke — And Canada is Finally Tired of His Hubris,” *The Telegraph*, September 5, 2011, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2021/09/05/justin-trudeau-king-woke-canada-has-finally-tired-hubris>.

Trudeau and the ‘Woke’ Generation”⁶; “Justin Trudeau, Woke Wordsmith”⁷; “The Woke Will Always Break Your Heart,”⁸ and my personal favorite, “Justin Trudeau, Canada’s Wizard of Woke Has Lost His Magic.”⁹ Here I found the missing link between wokeness and Canada: our young handsome Prime Minister who came to power in 2015 at the age of 42. As these catchy headlines communicate, our self-proclaimed feminist Prime Minister has captured the imagination of the world as being quintessentially “woke.”

What does woke mean in this context? From the articles above, it means constant apologizing for past wrongs both his personal mistakes and those of the country; refusal to use gendered language such as ‘mankind’ in public preferring to speak instead of ‘people kind’ for example; advocating for a perfect equality between men and women in his cabinet; espousing a so called “feminist” international development policy with abortion and reproductive rights at its center; always being the star of the gay pride parades with his wife and young children; identifying himself with environmental causes; advocating for abortion rights and promising to do all he can to silence groups and organizations that seek to support pregnant women who find themselves in precarious circumstances. More examples could be found in the articles listed above. However, this hodge-podge mix of political correctness and the advancement of the “new rights” does not seem to fit the definition of woke culture that is emerging from the United States. Having established a plausible link between Canada and woke culture, let us now turn our attention to the American experience of woke culture. As was mentioned in the introduction, I am not convinced that labelling Canada’s anthropological error woke is altogether accurate, and I hope this brief exploration will help in communicating why.

⁶ Margaret Wentz, “Justin Trudeau and the ‘Woke’ Generation,” *The Globe and Mail*, June 14, 2019, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-justin-trudeau-and-the-woke-generation/>.

⁷ “Justin Trudeau, Woke Wordsmith,” *Spike-Online Magazine*, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://www.spiked-online.com/2021/05/05/justin-trudeau-woke-wordsmith/>.

⁸ Stephen Marche, “The Woke Will Always Break Your Heart,” *The Atlantic Magazine*, October 3, 2019, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/10/trudeaus-progressive-style/599203/>.

⁹ Roger Boyes, “Justin Trudeau, Canada’s Wizard of Woke Has Lost His Magic,” *The Times*, October 23, 2019, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/justin-trudeau-canadas-wizard-of-woke-has-lost-his-magic-8tz0p303m>.

WOKE CULTURE IN AMERICA

Let's begin with a straightforward definition of woke which was added to the Oxford English dictionary in 2007. "Woke, adjective: Originally: well-informed, up-to-date. Now chiefly: alert to racial or social discrimination and injustice; frequently in *stay woke*."¹⁰ Its origins in African American community in the early 20th century in reference to alertness of racial and social injustices have been well documented.¹¹ The term gained prominence especially through the Black Lives Matter movement and in the rise of Critical Race Theory as a lens through which to interpret the history of marginalized groups, especially the treatment of Black slaves in American history.¹²

Its meaning can seem elusive as woke is used both positively and pejoratively: On the one hand, it connotes a healthy sense of realism towards past and present racism and the desire to seek justice. On the other, it is used in an ironic sense to critique what is seen as an exaggerated, public concern for hot button issues related to minority groups.

And its origins? The confusion continues: In his comments on woke culture, the American Bishop Robert Barron attributes its origins to the French Enlightenment ideals that have been embraced by intellectuals at American universities where he sees this woke culture is playing out.¹³ On the other hand, when asked about this attribution this summer, the eminent French political philosopher Pierre Manent replied pointed the finger back to America: "It comes from the American campuses that were naïve enough to take seriously highfalutin ratiocinations of cocky French *philosophes*."¹⁴

Lastly, how are Catholics supposed to position themselves in front of woke culture? Headlines in the popular Jesuit magazine *America* have

¹⁰ Katy Steinmetz, "The Oxford English Dictionary Just Added 'Woke.' It's Older Than You Might Think," *Time Magazine*, June 25, 2017, accessed December 14, 2021 <https://time.com/4830959/oxford-english-dictionary-woke>.

¹¹ Aja Romano, "A History of 'Wokeness'," *Vox Magazine*, October 9, 2020, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://www.vox.com/culture/2020>.

¹² See Janel George, "A Lesson on Critical Race Theory," *Human Rights Magazine*, January 11, 2021, accessed December 14, 2021, https://www.americanbar.org/groups/crsj/publications/human_rights_magazine_home/civil-rights-reimagining-policing/a-lesson-on-critical-race-theory/.

¹³ Bishop Robert Barron, "Has Liberalism Failed? Bishop Barron Presents: A Conversation Featuring David Rubin," premiered November 2, 2020, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tctSwn04VR8>.

¹⁴ Nathaniel Peters and Pierre Manent, "Europe and America After COVID: An Interview with Pierre Manent," *Public Discourse: A Journal of the Witherspoon Institute*, June 12, 2021, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2021/06/76281/>.

heralded that Catholics should be woke for its part of the tradition of Catholic Social Teaching.¹⁵ On the other hand, Rod Dreher, the author of the *Benedict Option* and editor of the *American Conservative* has argued that it is a movement that attacks the foundations of Western civilization.¹⁶

The evangelical theologian Owen Strachan, Senior Fellow at Family Research Council's Center for Biblical Worldview, has taken on the challenge of defining woke culture for a Christian audience in his latest book *Christianity and Wokeness: How the Social Justice Movement Is Hijacking the Gospel - and the Way to Stop It*.¹⁷ Identifying the intellectual roots of wokeness, Strachan defines it in the following way: "Wokeness is first and foremost a mindset and a posture borne of Critical Race Theory and related systems of thought. The term itself means that one is "awake" to the true nature of our society where so many fail to see it. In the most specific sense, this means one sees the comprehensive inequity of our social order and the corresponding need for racial and social justice."¹⁸ The Columbia Law School Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw is well known for her legal contribution to the development of Critical Race Theory and related systems of thought to which Strachan is referring.¹⁹ She coined the related term "intersectionality" in a 1989 academic paper "to describe how race, class, gender, and other individual characteristics "intersect" with one another and overlap."²⁰ In her own words, Crenshaw says that Critical Race Theory (C.R.T.) is "more a verb than a noun." "It is a way of seeing, attending to, accounting for, tracing and analyzing the ways that race is produced," she says, "the ways that racial inequality is facilitated, and the ways that our

¹⁵ Kathleen Bonnette, "Catholics: Embrace being woke: it's part of our Catholic tradition," *America: The Jesuit Review*, May 26, 2021, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://www.americamagazine.org/politics-society/2021/05/26/wokeness-pastoral-cycle-see-judge-act-240639>.

¹⁶ Rod Dreher, "Idols, Identity Politics and Lies of Our Age," Public Lecture at Patrick Henry College, March 25, 2021, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3q3Omo2K2m0&t=721s>.

¹⁷ Owen Strachan, *Christianity and Wokeness: How the Social Justice Movement is Hijacking the Gospel — and the Way to Stop It* (Oregon: Blackstone Publishing, 2021).

¹⁸ Owen Strachan, "What Does it Mean to be "Woke" and How Does Church Discipline Apply?," *Patheos*, October 14, 2021, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://www.patheos.com/blogs/thoughtlife/2020/10/what-does-it-mean-to-be-woke-and-how-does-church-discipline-apply/>.

¹⁹ "What is Critical Race Theory and Why is Everyone Talking About it?," *Columbia University News*, July 1, 2021, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://news.columbia.edu/news/what-critical-race-theory-and-why-everyone-talking-about-it-0>.

²⁰ Jane Coaston, "The Intersectionality Wars," *The Vox Magazine*, May 28, 2019, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://www.vox.com/the-highlight/2019/5/20/18542843/intersectionality-conservatism-law-race-gender-discrimination>.

history has created these inequalities that now can be almost effortlessly reproduced unless we attend to the existence of these inequalities.²¹

According to Strachan, Critical Race Theory and intersectionality offer not only a lens through which to understand racial injustice in society but a vision of society as a whole where relations of power and domination are paramount. What does this mean for Christians? To paraphrase him, woke culture sees the world in terms of power, whereas Christianity sees the world in terms of love. Catholic Social Teaching is also concerned with notions of justice, sin, forgiveness, reparation and solidarity, but all have their basis in a theology and an ontology of love; God who revealed himself as love is both Creator and Redeemer. Woke culture is also concerned with justice but lacks these theological, ontological and anthropological horizons of Catholic Social Teaching and this is where it becomes problematic. Strachan's approach of comparing and contrasting the biblical world view with that of wokeness is helpful for it brings to the fore first principles of the woke worldview that are less easily grasped at first glance, as well as helping us Christians become more conscious of the novelty of a biblical worldview and our tradition of social doctrine that we often take for granted.

While it is beyond the scope of this paper to enter too deeply into these foundational insights of "wokeness," we are now in a position to ask ourselves if Canada is a woke culture. Is Trudeau quintessentially "woke" in the strict definition of the term? If we look at Crenshaw's definition of CRT and Strachan's criticism of woke culture, the answer is no. While it is certainly present, Canada does not seem to have the same dominance of woke culture in terms of CRT as is manifested south of our border. Is it helpful for our purposes to assess Canada's culture as woke? In keeping with the notion of woke in the headlines cited above, we can affirm that Canada is advancing a "light" woke culture, in the sense of unabashedly advancing the so called "new rights." Under his leadership is Canada advancing and enshrining an anthropological error in its laws and policies? Yes, we can say so with certainty.

But a Prime Minister alone does not a country make, nor a culture make. The final link in this argument equating Canada and woke culture is the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.²² What is this Charter and why it is of interest? Crafted by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's father Pierre Elliot

²¹ Jacey Fortin, "Critical Race Theory: A Brief History," *The New York Times*, November 8, 2021, accessed December 14, 2021 <https://www.nytimes.com/article/what-is-critical-race-theory.html>.

²² See the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/const/page-12.html>.

Trudeau when he was Minister of Justice, this Charter sought to make Canada's Constitution independent of the British Parliament in 1982. Since 1982, the Charter has slowly shaped Canadians understanding of rights and freedoms. While it covers a wide range of rights and freedoms that would be typical of any democratic country, appeals to so called Charter "values" have been advanced to promote abortion, euthanasia, and gender ideology.

The facility of Trudeau and his government as well as Canada's Supreme Court to introduce laws and to expand rights under what is being called a woke agenda is due above all to the Charter and the understanding of rights that it espouses. This argument has been advanced by Scott Yenor in a review of Hugh Donald Forbes book *Multiculturalism in Canada: Constructing a Model of Multiculture with Multicultural Values*.²³ In this book, the political philosopher Forbes warns of the potent mix of a policy of multiculturalism and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms that can lead to disaster. Linking the Charter and woke culture, Yenor asks: "What is the endgame of the woke revolution?" "The movement is hostile to the old ways. New ways of thinking are emerging. A new way of life is emerging, too- he warns- and with a new understanding of politics," he concludes. Any nation who follows in Canada's footsteps, he warns, will end up with an apathetic body politic that embraces without much resistance what he calls Canada's "transgender empire," and an omnipresence of government bureaucracy seeping into more elements of personal life: "It delivers internal chaos, as it strikes at natural attachments and cultivates inhumane dreams. Its social glue is none too sticky: It delivers a freedom provided by human rights commissions, the equality of an increasingly deceptive quota system, and an authenticity that masks accommodation and silence."²⁴ While this may not be a balanced portrayal of the whole of Canadian culture, one cannot disagree with the characteristics that Yenor points out. To help us enter more deeply into the link between the Charter and the anthropological error that Yenor and Forbes are suggesting, let us look briefly at the Canadian philosopher George Grant's reading of how "rights" have been interpreted in Canada's legal tradition. This will be of necessity a very brief introduction, but I believe it to be helpful nonetheless.

²³ Scott Yenor, "Lament for a Nation," *First Things Magazine*, June 21, 2021, <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2021/06/lament-for-the-nations>, accessed December 14, 2021. See also Hugh Donald Forbes, *Multiculturalism in Canada: Constructing a Model of Multiculture with Multicultural Values* (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2019).

²⁴ Ibid.

GEORGE GRANT ON CANADA'S ANTHROPOLOGICAL ERROR

Although the philosopher George Grant is little known today, he was one of the most influential Canadians of his time. His vast writings made known his original contribution to a wide variety of issues such as nationalism, technology and abortion, which were often critical of the dominant trends in public thought. His reading of Canada's political and legal framework and its Charter in light of the moral and ontological synthesis stemming from the encounter between the Ancient Greek and Christian world views is a sure guide to interpreting Canada's anthropological error.

His critique turns around an understanding of rights that is removed from the good, and a corresponding freedom that—stripped from an intrinsic orientation to the good—is left to be interpreted as the mere removal of obstacles to self-expression. Even in the decades leading up the Charter, Grant could see the direction that a reductive notion of freedom as mere self-expression would lead the country. His critique of the notions of rights and freedoms will be our interpretive key in our presentation of examples of Canada's anthropological error. These examples demonstrate how every obstacle that stands in the way of freedom understood as mere self-expression and self-affirmation void of relationship to a moral or given order, end up being affirmed and protected and advanced in the name of so-called Charter rights and values.

Grant's 1965 *Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism* is known as one of his most important works.²⁵ In it, Grant offers an analysis of how Canada came to embrace a particularly dangerous form of liberal freedom. The legalization of abortion south of the border and later in Canada, signaled to Grant a new and dangerous form of political liberalism.²⁶ The decision to place the so-called right of a woman over the person of the child and their right to life signaled to him the break between rights and the good. This in turn strips the notion of freedom of any intrinsic order to the good and one is left with a dangerous new understanding of freedom. In the introduction to the latest edition to the book, Andrew Potter offers a succinct summary of Grant's understanding of this form of liberal freedom: "Because

²⁵ George Grant, *Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism* (Montreal: McGill – Queens University Press, 2005).

²⁶ Cf. William Mathie, "Abortion and the Crisis of Liberal Justice. George Grant on the Meaning of *Roe v. Wade*," *University Academics for Life, Proceedings of Life and Learning VIII*, 2008, accessed December 14, 2021, <http://www.uflf.org/vol%208/mathie8.pdf>.

liberalism has the maximizing of human freedom as the central good, *anything that hinders the exercise of freedom is seen as an obstacle to be removed*. This has the effect of turning questions of ultimate value into matters of mere “convenience” or “quality of life.”²⁷

While gay marriage and gender identity were not yet protected by the Canadian Charter during Grant’s lifetime, his proposal of what can be called a “technological anthropology” can help us understand the logic that has propelled, and will continue to propel our country to enshrining new, never before imagined rights. Following Heidegger, Grant argued that technology had become the new “ontology” of our age.²⁸ This technological ontology gave him the framework in which to understand the origins of this new expression of liberal freedom beginning to be adopted in Canada.

What does he mean by technological ontology? Let us listen to Grant in his own words: For “modern technology as an ontology conceives of all of nature (including the human body) as a source of what Heidegger calls “standing reserve”—a source of energy or resources, stored in anticipation for future use. The essence of technology is that it constitutes a way of thinking in which the world is set before man, to be questioned, interrogated and exploited.”²⁹ As the Grant scholar of Grant Usuf Kumar writes: “Anything that is beyond the self is by definition a limitation on individuality, which in turn is a limitation on one’s understanding of the self as freedom. Limitations on selfhood or individuality are encumbrances that must be removed if freedom is to be enjoyed to the fullest.”³⁰ A true prophet, Grant foresaw forty years ago the impact of the Charter’s vision of rights on the country: an increasing affirmation of the “right prior to the good; a foundational contract protecting individual rights; the neutrality of the state concerning moral values; social pluralism supported by and supporting this neutrality.”³¹

Unfortunately, this is the sort of advancement and celebration of so-called freedom that Justin Trudeau is known for. With this logic of freedom, he and the Canadian judiciary, have indeed become “wizards,” magically enshrining

²⁷ See note 25, Andrew Potter, “Introduction to the 40th Anniversary Edition,” xli.

²⁸ See George Grant, “Thinking About Technology,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 28 (Fall 2001), 610–626. See also David L. Schindler, “America’s Technological Ontology and the Gift of the Given: Benedict XVI on the Cultural Significance of the *Quaerere Deum*,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 38 (Summer 2011), 237–278.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ See note 27, cited by Potter, xliv.

³¹ *Ibid.*

a new vision of man and woman, of life and death, of what it means to be child and a parent, of embodied existence tout court, into Canada's laws and self-understanding. Let us now look briefly at Pope John Paul II's definition of culture and the three of the markers of culture that were essential for him: birth, love (sexual difference) and death. We will then proceed to reflect on how these markers have been interpreted in recent legal and political decisions reflective of Canadian culture.

JOHN PAUL II ON CULTURE

If wokeism is expressed in culture, where can we read the writing of wokeness on the so called "cultural wall" of Canada? To begin to answer this question, let us now turn our attention to the definition of culture that John Paul II gave us in *Centesimus Annus*, as this is a conference dedicated to the celebration of this encyclical. He offers this definition of culture in the context of a discussion the events of 1989 and the collapse of communism, which may be helpful given that woke culture also has its roots in political and legal theory:

It is not possible to understand man on the basis of economics alone, nor to define him simply on the basis of class membership. Man is understood in a more complete way when he is situated within the sphere of culture through his language, history, and the position he takes towards the fundamental events of life, such as birth, love, work and death. At the heart of every culture lies the attitude man takes to the greatest mystery: the mystery of God. Different cultures are basically different ways of facing the question of the meaning of personal existence. When this question is eliminated, the culture and moral life of nations are corrupted.³²

In a word, culture is the expression of how a nation interprets and answers the question of the meaning of personal existence. It is expressed in the position a people take to the fundamental events of life such as birth, love, work and death, and above all, one's openness to the mystery of God. For the scope of this paper, we will limit our discussion to the categories of birth, love—in which I will include sexual difference, and death. We will take each one in turn.

³² John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus*, n. 24, Holy See, accessed December 14, 2021, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_0105_1991_centesimus-annus.html.

BIRTH

How is birth understood in Canada's so called woke culture? Canada has the most liberal abortion laws in the world. The Supreme Court of Canada struck down the federal law criminalizing abortion in 1988 as unconstitutional.³³ However, no government since has put in place legislation to replace it. This means that there is no law regulating abortion in Canada: it is legal at all stages throughout the pregnancy. Late term abortions are rare.³⁴ An estimated 1 in 3 Canadian women will have an abortion during her lifetime, most commonly performed in the first trimester of pregnancy.³⁵

Even with this very liberal access to abortion, Justin Trudeau has placed expanding and securing abortion access at home and abroad at the core of his political agenda. Expressing the notion of freedom that we introduced with Grant, Trudeau is not happy to only expand access abortion (it may be legal but not every city and town has hospitals that perform abortions) but he is set on removing individuals and groups that do not share his views. For example, in his recent re-election campaign, Trudeau promised that he would revoke charitable status to pregnancy centers that seek to offer support to pregnant women rather than counsel for abortion.³⁶ Without charitable status, these groups would lose their tax benefits and other privileges granted to charitable organizations which will essentially make it impossible to stay open.³⁷

³³ See Margaret Burnett, "A History of Abortion in Canada: The Quest for Women's Reproductive Rights," *The Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology of Canada*, Volume 41, Supplement 2, 293-295, accessed December 14, 2021, [https://www.jogc.com/article/S1701-2163\(19\)30737-6/fulltext](https://www.jogc.com/article/S1701-2163(19)30737-6/fulltext).

³⁴ See "Abortion Rights in Canada Position Paper 22," May 2017, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://www.arcc-cdac.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/22-Late-term-Abortions.pdf>.

³⁵ Sheila Dunn and Rebecca Cooke, "Medical Abortion in Canada: Behind the Times," *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, January 7, 2004; 186(1): 13-14, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3883814/>.

³⁶ See Justin Trudeau's 2021 Election Campaign Platform, *Forward For Everyone*, specifically under the section titled "Protecting your Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights," 4, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://liberal.ca/wp-content/uploads/sites/292/2021/09/Platform-Forward-For-Everyone.pdf>.

³⁷ Trudeau made a similar move in 2017. In the name of promoting reproductive rights, Trudeau's Liberal government added to the *Federal Canada Summer Jobs* program application in 2017 a requirement that groups check a box on their application attesting that both their core mandate and proposed summer job respect the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms as well as "other rights." These "other rights" explicitly included reproductive rights. It was an attempt to not give funding to prolife groups who were in reality a very small minority of recipients. This received much pushback but in the end the government held their ground; only two years later did they modify the attestation to be more general. Needless to say, this effected not only prolife

Also, when he became the leader of the Liberal Party of Canada in 2014, he enacted a policy that every member of the Liberal Party would have to vote pro-choice; he would no longer allow any freedom of expression among the members of parliament.³⁸ He said that “Liberal MPs are welcome and encouraged to hold fast to their personal beliefs.” But, he asserted, “Under my leadership, incoming Liberal MPs will always vote in favor of a woman’s fundamental rights.”³⁹ This closing down of other points of view and limiting elected officials’ freedom of conscience are troubling signs of what Grant called a liberal notion of freedom that seeks to cancel any and all obstacles to its self-realization.

Trudeau is also very proud of his feminist international development policy of his government that was launched in 2017. It places access to contraception and abortion at its core and has celebrated the increase in funding for abortion and contraception abroad in terms of advancing women’s and girls’ rights.⁴⁰

Lastly, Trudeau has begun to use the fact that he is a man to say that he is not able to comment on abortion which to him only women have the right to discuss and comment on. He shared the sentiment on a popular Twitter post this past summer in the run up to the federal election: “The right to choose is a woman’s right and a woman’s right alone. Every woman in Canada has a right to a safe and legal abortion. It’s time men stop telling other men that it’s ok for them to decide what women can or cannot do with their bodies.”⁴¹ “I continue to be and will always be fully pro-choice but I no longer feel that I can or need to say that I’m against abortion, that’s not for me as a man to

organizations but many groups did not benefit from hiring students to work in their day camps and soup kitchens and other important services for the community because they did not agree with the need to attest to supporting reproductive rights in order to hire summer students. See the helpful analysis of Peter Stockland, “Time to rethink funding in fight for summer jobs,” *The Catholic Register*, January 9, 2018, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://www.catholicregister.org/opinion/columnists/item/26636-peter-stockland-time-to-rethink-funding-in-fight-for-summer-jobs>.

³⁸ Daniel Leblanc, “Trudeau now says all Liberal MP’s must vote pro-choice,” *The Globe and Mail*, June 18, 2014, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/trudeau-says-all-liberals-mp-will-have-to-vote-pro-choice/article19218815/>.

³⁹ Trudeau cited in Leslie MacKinnon, “Justin Trudeau’s abortion stance leaves Liberal ranks in confusion,” *CBC News*, May 21, 2014, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/justin-trudeau-s-abortion-stance-leaves-liberal-ranks-in-confusion-1.2648752>.

⁴⁰ For more details, see Canada’s so called *Feminist International Assistance Policy* at the Global Affairs Canada, accessed December 14, 2021, https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues_development-enjeux_developpement/priorities-priorites/policy-politique.aspx?lang=eng.

⁴¹ Justin Trudeau, Twitter post, July 31, 2021, 10:14 a.m., <https://twitter.com/justintrudeau/status/1421474397727166467>.

say.”⁴² This argument linking sexual identity with the right to use of one’s reason seems to be a trend typical of woke culture. Woke culture does away with common human experiences and renders everything highly subjective. While it is important to listen to women’s experiences, birth and childhood are not tied to one or other of the sexes but are realities that everyone can ponder and discuss. When rights are separated from the good, it seems that experience becomes absolutely subjective, making dialogue and debate impossible.

Lastly, his ongoing push for a one size fits all national subsidized day care policy also suggests that children are above all seen through the lens of economics.⁴³ Yes, please have children, but do not leave the workforce for too long. The new daycare policy encourages women to return to work as soon as possible, leaving their children to the care of state-run early education centers. What can be said about Trudeau’s understanding of birth? Who is the child for Trudeau? A child seems to be the origin of an individual’s act of freedom understood as self-expression.⁴⁴ Canada’s laws and policies on *in vitro* fertilization, surrogacy as well as gay marriage and adoption, which we cannot get into in this paper, also seem to suggest that anyone has a right to a child, but no child has the right to be born, or to be born as the fruit of a stable union of man and of a woman who have bound themselves in love.

LOVE AND SEXUAL DIFFERENCE

How has Trudeau and his government advanced this new understanding of freedom and rights in its understanding of marriage and of embodied sexual identity? We can only touch the surface of the many developments, and we will highlight cultural understandings of marriage and gender. In July 2005, Bill C-38 became federal law which gave same-sex couples the

⁴² Christopher Reynolds, “Trudeau says his views have evolved and he is now totally pro-choice,” *The National Post*, October 4, 2019, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://nationalpost.com/pmn/news-pmn/canada-news-pmn/trudeau-says-his-views-have-evolved-and-he-is-now-totally-pro-choice>.

⁴³ For a thoughtful and comprehensive presentation of the policy and its alternatives, see the Cardus Family study, “A Positive Vision For Child Care Policy Across Canada,” January 21, 2019, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://www.cardus.ca/research/family/reports/positive-vision-for-child-care-policy-across-canada/>.

⁴⁴ For a deeper reflection in the meaning of birth, see Luigi Giussani and Giovanni Testori, *The Meaning of Birth* (La Vergne: Slant Books, 2022); Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II, *Person and Community: Selected Essays* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993).

legal right to marry.⁴⁵ This made Canada the fourth country in the world to allow same-sex marriage. Even though the definition of marriage has been changed to a commitment between two adults, regardless of their sexual difference and their natural capacity to have children, common law and married same sex couples form only 1% of all Canadian households according to the most recent census data in 2016.⁴⁶ Since this time, there has been a concerted effort to incorporate and expand a new anthropology expressive of the LGBTQ2 community in Canadian law and policy. To assist in this process, in 2016, Trudeau appointed a special adviser to the government for LGBTQ2 issues whose mandate includes this type of inclusion and rethinking of what it means to be man and woman.⁴⁷ The following year, he offered a historic apology to the LGBTQ2 community on behalf of the government for Canada's collective shame for its "state-sponsored, systematic oppression and rejection" of this community.⁴⁸ There are just reasons for members of this minority community to seek justice from government. These offenses have been documented.⁴⁹ However, there is a difference between apologizing

⁴⁵ See "Bill C-38: Civil Marriage Act," Parliament of Canada, accessed December 14, 2021, https://lop.parl.ca/sites/PublicWebsite/default/en_CA/ResearchPublications/LegislativeSummaries/381LS502E.

⁴⁶ The shape of Canadian families is certainly shifting. Last year Statistics Canada released the latest data on marriage and family dating from 2016. The *Canadian Marriage Map* prepared by Cardus Family helps distill some of the general trends. The latest portrait of opposite and same sex households in Canada is from 2016: 78% of couples are opposite sex, 21% are common law opposite sex, 0.6% are common law same sex, and 0.4% are married same sex. Common-law couples account for about 17.8 percent of all census families, or about 21.3 percent of all couples in Canada, with some of the highest percentage of couples being from Quebec. See Cardus' "The Canadian Marriage Map," June 23, 2020, Cardus. Imagination toward a Thriving Society, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://www.cardus.ca/research/family/reports/the-canadian-marriage-map/>.

⁴⁷ On November 15, 2016, Trudeau named Randy Boissonnault, Member of Parliament for Edmonton Centre, Special Advisor on LGBTQ2 issues. See the press release at Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://pm.gc.ca/en/news/news-releases/2016/11/15/prime-minister-announces-special-advisor-lgbtq2-issues#:~:text=The%20Prime%20Minister%2C%20Justin%20Trudeau,Government%20of%20Canada's%20LGBTQ2%20agenda>.

⁴⁸ A transcript of Trudeau's apology can be found on the website of the Canadian Government, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://pm.gc.ca/en/news/speeches/2017/11/28/remarks-prime-minister-justin-trudeau-apologize-lgbtq2-canadians>.

⁴⁹ In 2017, Egale Canada presented to the government a study called the "Just Society Report," in which it states: "Canada has a tragic history of state sponsored homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia dating back to contact and the suppression of the Two Spirit traditions among First Nations. The criminal law has been, and continues to be, a cornerstone of that oppression. The Just Society Committee is calling for a process of "truth and rehabilitation," whereby the Federal Government will acknowledge the wrongs done to our community and commit to a process to make it right." This document and its calls for action have been significant for shaping

for past wrongs, and seeking forgiveness, and making this so-called new anthropology systematic in Canadian political and legal culture. We will return to this point at this end of the section.

How has Canada enshrined new rights related to sexual orientation and gender identity? In 1995, Canada began to integrate the language of the anthropology of gender (orientation, sex and gender identity) into its Charter and human rights legislation and in 1996 the federal government passed Bill C-33, adding “sexual orientation” to the Canadian Human Rights Act which covers federally-regulated activities.

Let us highlight a few key moments in Canadian law and policy that exemplify this new anthropology since Trudeau became prime minister:

- Bill C-16 was passed on June 19, 2017 which updated the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Criminal Code to include the terms “gender identity” and “gender expression.”⁵⁰ The legislation also makes it illegal to discriminate on the basis of gender identity or expression. It also extends hate speech laws to include the two terms, and makes it a hate crime to target someone for being transgender. With this new legislation in place, is it even possible to publically oppose gender ideology or to propose a different anthropology — a Christian anthropology — in the public sphere? Or will this be considered hate speech?
- On January 10, 2021 the British Columbia Court of Appeal reaffirmed a 15-year-old’s right to undergo hormone treatment for a gender transition even without both parents’ consent, as long as they have been assessed by a health care provider to understand the nature, consequences, benefits and risks of the proposed treatment, and as long as the health care provider believed that the treatment is in the teenager’s best interests.⁵¹ In

Trudeau’s policies. See Egale, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://egale.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Just-Society-Report-Grossly-Indecent-Executive-Summary.pdf>.

⁵⁰ See “Bill C-16: An Act to Amend the Canadian Human Rights Code and the Criminal Code.” Department of Justice, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/csj-sjc/pl/identity-identite/statement-enonce.html>. The University of Toronto’s Jordan Peterson witnessed before the Senate to his opposition to the Bill, and a transcript of this intervention can be found on the Senate of Canada’s website, accessed December 14, 2022, <https://sencanada.ca/en/Content/SEN/Committee/421/lcjc/53339-e>.

⁵¹ See the judgment of the case from the Court of Appeal from British Columbia, accessed December 14, 2022, <https://www.bccourts.ca/jdb-txt/ca/20/00/2020BCCA0011.htm>. Professor Doug Farrow offers scathing judgment regarding this case, which also serves to situate this decision in its proper political and cultural context. Douglas Farrow, “The New Family Violence,” *First Things Magazine*, August 5, 2019, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://www.firstthings.com/web-exclusives/2019/05/the-new-family-violence>.

a previous decision, where a father objected to his child (born female)'s gender transition, the Supreme Court judge declared that identifying the teen as a girl would be considered family violence under the Family Law Act, given the harm it had caused him, and that the father would be charged. But this Court of Appeal ruling threw out part of a lower court order that said the father's misgendering of his son constituted "family violence."

- The federal government introduced *Bill C-8: An Act to Amend the Criminal Code (Conversion Therapy)* on March 9, 2021 which proposes legislative amendments to the Criminal Code of Canada that will make providing, forcing, profiting from or advertising conversion therapy a criminal act. The changes would also authorize courts to order the seizure and removal of advertisements for conversion therapy. It received royal assent and became law on December 8, 2021.⁵² It should be noted that no substantial conversation about the meaning of "conversion therapy" was allowed in the public debate, so there was no possibility to distinguish between abusive practices and scientifically recognized psychotherapeutic methods sought after by consenting adults.

What can be gleaned from these examples regarding how woke culture is expressed in Canada's understanding of love and sexual difference? Love is celebrated as a feeling of happiness and as a desire to share one's life. Marriage is seen as a public commitment recognized by the state but with no intrinsic obligations towards the state in terms of child rearing and education. The relationship between the state, the common good and marriage is no longer considered. Sexual difference is also seen as untethered from nature and therefore as a social construct. One must at all costs respect everyone's sexual identity and gender expression, even to the point of being threatened with criminal offence. Trudeau's government's decision to make criminal the accompaniment of a person who desires to have their biological identity and gender expression coincide, even when it is desired by a consenting adult, only exemplifies this quasi-irrational thrust to eliminate anything that stands in the way of freedom conceived of as pure self-expression.

⁵² See the judgment, Parliament of Canada, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://www.parl.ca/DocumentViewer/en/44-1/bill/C-4/royal-assent>. Fr. Andrew Bennett offered a timely reflection on the difficulties of this decision in *Convivium Magazine*: "Conversion Therapy Bill Off Target," *Convivium Magazine*, March 22, 2021, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://www.convivium.ca/articles/conversion-therapy-bill-off-target/>. In the same review, Andre Schutten has offered an important reflection of the new law and its relationship to freedom which is equally insightful, "Chief Concern with Conversion Therapy Law," *Convivium Magazine*, December 8, 2021, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://www.convivium.ca/articles/chief-concern-with-conversion-therapy-law/>.

This I believe is the heart of Canada's anthropological error: it no longer has a unified vision of embodied sexual difference, love and fecundity, the key elements of what is known as the "nuptial mystery," upon which to judge and discern trends in law and culture. Personal identity must be absolutely forged by each individual rather than be fundamentally received through the original givenness of their body and their family relations. With the separation of freedom from the good, as Grant noticed, we are similarly left with a naked and neutered freedom that has no orientation in the sense of direction that precedes one's will. This has led to a series of decisions which have enshrined the new anthropology of gender as the official, state sanctioned anthropology of Canada. What is more, it is now the basis of most provincial sexual education curricula and has become so common place that it is hardly challenged.⁵³ This seems to be the new normal.

DEATH

How is the meaning of the end of life perceived in Canadian culture? In June 2016, Bill C-14 was passed which amended the Criminal Code to legalize euthanasia under the guise of "medical aid in dying" (MAID).⁵⁴ It was popularly promoted as an act of compassion for the terminally ill and specifically extended persons whose suffering was grave and death imminent. In this short time since euthanasia was decriminalized, it seems that the desire to expand access to euthanasia is without end. Immediately, four separate court challenges were initiated on the grounds that Bill C-14 violated the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.⁵⁵ In 2019, the Superior Court of Quebec ruled that the law violated the *Canadian Charter*

⁵³ One such example is the Sexual Education curriculum proposed by the Quebec Government in 2018. The anthropology of gender is present throughout and is presented as young as elementary school. Cf. Ministère de l'éducation du gouvernement du Québec. Sexuality Education, accessed December 14, 2021, <http://www.education.gouv.qc.ca/en/teachers/dossiers/sexualityeducation/content/elementary/>.

⁵⁴ See Bill C-14: An Act to amend the Criminal Code and to make related amendments to other Acts (medical assistance in dying), Parliament of Canada, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://www.parl.ca/DocumentViewer/en/42-1/bill/C-14/royal-assent>.

⁵⁵ For a helpful guide through the development of Canada's "medical aid in dying" laws, see Benny Chan and Margaret Somerville, "Converting the Right to Life to the Right to Physician Assisted Suicide and Euthanasia: An Analysis of *Carter v. Canada* (Attorney General), Supreme Court of Canada," *Medical Law Review*, 2016 June; 24(2): 143–175, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4914707/>.

of Rights and Freedoms to restrict eligibility for MAID only to those persons whose natural deaths had been deemed reasonably foreseeable.⁵⁶ As a result, in March 2021, the law was amended to include persons who “have a serious and incurable illness, disease or disability; they must be in a “state of irreversible decline in capability” and have “an enduring and intolerable physical or psychological suffering.”⁵⁷

By what logic do we stop there? In June 2021, the Select Committee of the Evolution of the Act Respecting End of Life Care of the Quebec government invited “the Québec population to express their views on the issues at the heart of its mandate, namely the potential expansion of medical assistance in dying for people in a situation of incapacity (caused by a neurodegenerative disease such as Alzheimer’s) and for those whose only medical problem is a mental illness.”¹⁶ What sense can be made of this ever-growing expansion of access to euthanasia? Does everyone have a Charter right to die? It seems we are moving in this direction: mental illness, Alzheimer’s, illnesses where there is suffering but not imminent death... As Grant predicted, the safeguards and limits put upon the initial expression of law collapse in front of a sense of freedom understood as pure self-expression. Once one Canadian has a Charter right to die, do all Canadians have a right to die as well?

Justin Trudeau has been very supportive of this legislation. Commenting on the first court challenge which stipulated that the original legislation’s requirement that death be immanent was a violation of Canadian’s Charter rights, he said: “An awful lot of Canadians have experienced and accompanied their loved ones through difficult moments at the end of their lives,” said Trudeau. “Many more have had difficult conversations with their aging parents, for example, to understand their wishes. And I think the Supreme Court clearly said that it’s a violation of Canadians’ fundamental rights to have the current legislation in place. So it’s given us 12 months to go back to the drawing board and figure out a way to both uphold Canadians’ rights and protect the most vulnerable.”⁵⁸

⁵⁶ See Tu Thanh Ha, “Quebec court strikes down restrictions to medically assisted dying law, calls it unconstitutional,” *The Globe and Mail*, September 12, 2019, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/health-and-fitness/article-quebec-court-strikes-down-parts-of-laws-on-medically-assisted-death/>.

⁵⁷ The most recent eligibility for Canada’s “medical aid in dying” law can be found here, Government of Canada. Department of Justice, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/cj-jp/ad-am/bk-di.html>.

⁵⁸ “Trudeau on why he is pushing for physician assisted suicide,” *As It Happens, CBC Radio*. February 26, 2014, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/asithappens/as-it-happens-thursday-edition-1.2973643/trudeau-on-why-he-s-pushing-for-physician-assisted-dying-1.2974511>.

This supposed balance between one's so called "right to die" and the protection of the most vulnerable is turning out to be a near impossible balance. The public discussions to extend euthanasia to the mentally ill and disabled and the anecdotal evidence of euthanasia being given in situations that do not meet the criteria are alarming⁵⁹. At the same time, we are witnessing the forcing of palliative care institutions and health care professionals who do not support euthanasia to either participate or to undergo sanctions.⁶⁰ We saw this same pattern play out in the areas of birth and sexual difference. This new culture "cancels" so to speak anyone who does not think like it. Now that euthanasia is becoming part of health care, there is little political will to offer adequate funding to palliative care, as was promised in the legislation enacting MAID. In the media, death by choice is celebrated as the ultimate expression of one's freedom.

CHRISTIAN WITNESS: REASONS FOR HOPE

Can anything put the brakes on Canada's seemingly irrational and incessant drive to extend more and more new rights to its citizens? Is a cultural rebirth possible? Moreover, what are the responsibilities of Catholics who call this country our home? Can we communicate another experience of freedom? How can we witness to a new understanding of birth, love, sexual difference and death?

I have had many occasions over the past 6 years to speak with the faithful about these cultural developments in Quebec and in Canada through our Diocesan Centre for Marriage, Life and Family, I also have the privilege of teaching moral theology to our seminarians and collaborate in their formation. This new culture is not a reality that we are outside of, but we interior to it. It informs everything in our lives. The families we serve have to face these new ideologies. Our future priests have to minister in these new realities. I have witnessed the beginnings of this new culture, ever so delicate

⁵⁹ Citizen led initiatives such as *Vivre dans la Dignité/Living with Dignity*, the Euthanasia Prevention Coalition and the *Collectif des médecins contre l'euthanasie* are doing important work to raise awareness about the reality of euthanasia and how it is being implemented in our country.

⁶⁰ See Peter Stockland, "Shadows and Light on Palliative Care," *Convivium Magazine*, April 26, 2021, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://www.convivium.ca/articles/shadows-and-light-on-palliative-care/> and the work being done by the *Coalition for HealthCARE and Conscience* with their initiative "Canadians for Conscience," accessed December 14, 2021, <https://www.canadiansforconscience.ca/>.

and in need of nourishment and strengthening, in the people, families and communities I have had the privilege to meet. My hope comes from their witness of Christ's presence where I have glimpsed a new culture being borne within this so called "woke" one.

I would like to suggest two paths that I have found to be necessary and fruitful in this sphere of mission: the path of Christian judgment and the path of Christian witness.

First, the path of Christian judgment. Dialogue and debate in our culture are increasingly stifled. If one does not agree with the dominant political position, or if one asks questions to clarify, it is easy to be labeled as insensitive, politically incorrect or even racist or homophobic. For example, if you do not agree with the new language of gender theory, you are labeled anti-LGTBQ rather than as someone who may have sincere questions or who may have good reasons for espousing a different anthropology. This lack of ability to ask questions and lack of spaces of discussion stifles our Christian families and communities and prevents a Christian reading — or judgment — on the questions at hand. Without these spaces for judgment, we end up accepting the dominant view and fail to discover the relevance of faith to these very important issues of life, love and death, for example.

How can we begin to judge these cultural trends with the intelligence of faith? I have found Pope John Paul II's approach in *Veritatis Splendor* to be particularly helpful when trying to think with my students about these "new rights." It is a method of judgment that he uses throughout the document in his analysis of errors in recent moral theology. It is summarized in n. 34:

If we wish to undertake a critical discernment of these tendencies — a discernment capable of acknowledging what is legitimate, useful and of value in them, while at the same time pointing out their ambiguities, dangers and errors — we must examine them in the light of the fundamental dependence of freedom upon truth, a dependence which has found its clearest and most authoritative expression in the words of Christ: "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (Jn 8:32).⁶¹

In a word, this method of judgment begins by affirming what is positive, then asking what is ambiguous and finally, naming what is dangerous or mistaken in the position. It also calls one to examine their own experience

⁶¹ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Veritatis Splendor*, August 6, 1993, Holy See, accessed December 14, 2021, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_06081993_veritatis-splendor.html.

of freedom and its relationship with the Christian experience and to put it in dialogue with the alternative views of freedom being espoused. The critical judgment to which we are called begins with an affirmation of what is positive, if at all possible. For example, this exercise could be done with any of the examples above regarding changes to our understanding of birth, love, sexual difference and death. What is the desire behind this affirmation, this law, this so-called right? What, if anything, is legitimate, useful and of value? What is trying to be affirmed? What understanding of freedom, happiness and meaning is being affirmed? Then, we proceed with the questions we have about the issue: what is ambiguous in this position or anthropology? What remains vague? Lastly, we ask: what are the dangers and errors in this proposal? What is dangerous in how this proposal understands what it means to be human? What it is to be created male and female? What is missing or inadequate in this understanding of freedom or dignity? Etc. The creation of communities of discussion and reflection, spaces where we can be free to think and to ask questions, is of utmost importance for Christians today to respond intelligently to the challenges at hand.

Applying this method in discussing these new “anthropological errors,” I find people are grateful to have a way of making sense of a situation that seems to allow space for a judgment that moves beyond a simple—and even necessary—condemnation. Instead of stopping at condemnation, this method brings the whole of the Christian experience to bear on the issue in question.

Is this approach naïve? Perhaps. But Pope John Paul II had good reason for proposing it. When asked about the impact of Enlightenment philosophies and Marxism on Christian Europe, John Paul II began by putting at the center of his reflections the *mysterium iniquitatis*: the coexistence of good and evil. Human history, notes John Paul II, is “the theatre of the coexistence of good and evil.”⁶² The parable of the wheat and the weeds growing side by side was an apt image of this mystery. “Evil is always the absence of some good which ought to be present in a given being; it is a privation. It is never a total absence of the good. The way in which evil grows from the pure soil of good is a mystery. . . . So, if evil exists alongside good, good perseveres beside evil and grows, so to speak, from the same soil, namely human nature. This has not been destroyed, and has not become totally corrupt, despite original sin. Nature has retained its capacity for good, as history confirms.”⁶³

⁶² See note 3, 4.

⁶³ Ibid.

It is worth noting in this discussion about Christian witness in woke culture that human nature retains its goodness. It is never completely destroyed. The human heart, we could say, always retains some memory of its origin in God, some desire for truth, goodness and beauty.⁶⁴ John Paul II's proposal of a method of judging cultural and moral problems is rooted in this affirmation and trust in the heart of the human person.

What is the relationship between the strengthening of Christian judgement and the birth of a new culture? In his refreshing analysis of Christian culture which was born in his experience working with young people in Italy, Luigi Giussani offers the beginning of an answer. He suggests that a new culture will be generated by Christians reflecting on the encounter they have had with Christ, rather than correct arguments about moral norms (which is not to say that they are not important). "The new culture," writes Luigi Giussani, "is a vision of the world- from the self to the Eternal- that starts off from an encounter you have had from an event that you are part of, from your coming across a Presence, not from books you read or ideas you hear."⁶⁵ To help ourselves grow in this awareness of Christ's Presence and the change it brings to life, we need to foster opportunities for discussion and reflection on our experience of faith. These are essential to grow in awareness of the novelty that Christ brings into our lives and our way of understanding, for example, birth, love, being a man or woman, and death. "This new awareness judges all the relationships of life and makes us able to love every bit of truth left in anyone, with a positivity and a critique unknown to the world."⁶⁶

The second path for hope is that of Christian witness. How is it possible to witness to our faith in such a culture? When asked about the life of the Church in the Third millennium in an interview, Angelo Cardinal Scola began by noting that the Church everywhere lacks confidence regarding how to effectively evangelize in the third millennium. "Pope Francis is right to say that we are not facing an era of change, but a change of era."⁶⁷ "We all have the perception that a historical era has ended, but cannot imagine what humanity in the third millennium will be like," he continued. "The problem is that Catholicism in general . . . has not yet figured out how to witness the

⁶⁴ Cf. Joseph Ratzinger, *On Conscience* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007).

⁶⁵ Luigi Giussani, *Generating Traces in the History of the World: New Traces of the Christian Experience* (Montreal: McGill Queens University Press, 2010), 112.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 106.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

faith in a pluralistic society.”⁶⁸ What will this witness look like? What form will it take? The description of the early Christians from the Epistle to Diognetus points to something both new and old in the way Christians have always been present in the world. I believe it indicates a path for how Christians are called to witness in this culture of “woke”: Let us look an excerpt from this letter and then I will offer a few concluding remarks.

Christians are indistinguishable from other men either by nationality, language or customs. They do not inhabit separate cities of their own, or speak a strange dialect, or follow some outlandish way of life. Their teaching is not based upon reveries inspired by the curiosity of men. Unlike some other people, they champion no purely human doctrine. With regard to dress, food and manner of life in general, they follow the customs of whatever city they happen to be living in, whether it is Greek or foreign. And yet there is something extraordinary about their lives. They live in their own countries as though they were only passing through. They play their full role as citizens, but labor under all the disabilities of aliens. Any country can be their homeland, but for them their homeland, wherever it may be, is a foreign country. Like others, they marry and have children, but they do not expose them. They share their meals, but not their wives.⁶⁹

Christians here are seen as ones who live amidst their fellow citizens in lands that codified what we could call anthropological errors, but who witnessed to something “extraordinary” in their lives. What was extraordinary? It was the way they lived the simple things in life. This newness was glimpsed precisely in the ways in which they understood childhood (they did not kill their babies while others did), love and sexual difference (they lived marriage with mutual fidelity while others “shared their wives”) and death (they did not kill their elderly and sick but cared for them). Is this the same path that we are asked to take? Do we witness to a different way of life in the simple things that make up daily life? I have seen this being borne around me, in how Christians live family life, welcome vulnerable pregnant and patients, I am witnessing a new extraordinary new culture being borne within the old one here in Canada.

Yes, our Christian presence in today’s culture has need of both judgment and witness. Our belief in Christ needs to become a truth that takes flesh in our lives. “For our faith has an irreconcilable anthropological, social and

⁶⁸ Cardinal Angelo Scola with Luigi Geninazzi, *Betting on Freedom, My Life in the Church* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2021), 101.

⁶⁹ Mathetes, “The Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus,” *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. 1, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885). Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight. New Advent, accessed December 14, 2021, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/0101.htm>.

cosmological value,” continues Scola, “whose implications must be deepened on the personal and communal level and proposed to everyone.”⁷⁰ The method of witness of the early Christians indicates for us a path forward. One can only hope that the Synodal path proposed for the Church over the next few years will help lay Christians deepen their appreciation of the baptismal identity and their need for silence and adoration, as Pope Francis has suggested, so we can be strengthened in our ability to witness to Christ in this challenging era.⁷¹

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, my thoughts return to the prophet Daniel at the end of this reflection on Canada’s woke culture and her anthropological errors. Oh Canada, “you have not humbled your heart, though you knew all this, but you have lifted up yourself against the Lord of heaven” (Dan 5:22). Putting aside God, you seek the gods of freedom, “but the God in whose hand is your breath, and whose are all your ways you have not honored” (Dan 5:23). You have forgotten your Creator and no longer acknowledge that your rights are a gift, that your freedoms are a gift. May St. Jean de Brebeuf and the Canadian Martyrs, St. Kateri Tekakwitha, St. Brother Andre, and the Servants of God George and Pauline Vanier, pray for us who are invited to be Christian witnesses in this land, that the awareness of being loved by Christ may make us fruitful missionaries so that all may discover the true freedom for which Christ has set us free.

⁷⁰ See note 67, 102.

⁷¹ Pope Francis has emphasized that the renewal he desires for the Church through the synodal path is rooted in the deepening appreciation for our baptismal identity and also that this path must be rooted in silence and adoration. He stresses both of these points in his homily launching the synodal path, as well as the speech he gave to introduce the synod. See Pope Francis, “Homily for the Opening of the Synodal Path,” October 10, 2021, Holy See, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2021/documents/20211010-omelia-sinodovescovi.html>, and “Moment of reflection for the beginning of the synodal journey,” October 9, 2021, Holy See, accessed December 14, 2021, <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/events/event.dir.html/content/vaticanevents/en/2021/10/9/apertura-camminosinodale.html>.

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„WOKE CULTURE” („KULTURA PRZEBUDZONYCH”)
NA PRZYKŁADZIE KANADY?
BŁĘDY ANTROPOLOGICZNE I SZANSE DLA MISJI

Streszczenie

W związku z niedawnym pojawieniem się tak zwanej kultury „woke culture” („kultury przebudzonych”) w Ameryce Północnej i Europie oraz biorąc pod uwagę różnorodność sposobów interpretacji „przebudzenia” przez chrześcijan, artykuł zaczyna się od zdefiniowania „woke culture” przez pryzmat antropologii: czym jest „woke culture” i co zakłada na temat znaczenia istoty ludzkiej?

Artykuł dowodzi, że „woke culture” niesie w sobie załączki błędu antropologicznego: lekceważy pierwotne obdarowanie ciałem, w tym zarówno przyrodzoną sensowność otrzymania ciała od drugiego, jak i znaczenie jego zróżnicowania płciowego jako mężczyzny lub kobiety. Następnie mówi się o uproszczonym rozumieniu ludzkiej wolności jako czystej „samo-realizacji”. Natomiast papież Jan Paweł II przedstawia adekwatną antropologię, umieszczając w jej centrum ucieleśnione ludzkie doświadczenie. Biorąc Kanadę za studium przypadku „woke culture”, omówiono przykłady z trzech podstawowych antropologicznych kategorii: narodzin, miłości (różnicy seksualnej) i śmierci. W obliczu wielkiego zamieszania, jakie wywołała ta nowa kategoria „przebudzenia”, ocena jej antropologicznych podstaw przygotowuje osoby zaangażowane w katolicką edukację lub duszpasterstwo do adekwatnej odpowiedzi na stawiane przez nią wyzwania. Artykuł zachęca zarówno do krytycznego odczytania kultury przebudzenia, jak i do odważnej kreatywności.

Słowa kluczowe: „woke culture”; Kanada; Justin Trudeau; nowe prawa; George Grant; Kanadyjska Karta Praw i Wolności, Jan Paweł II, antropologia teologii.