**Book Review on "waking up white and finding myself in the story of race" by Debby Irving**

This book was a disagreeable read for me. I am glad that I stuck with it, but it was challenging at times. I found the book useful in better understanding much of the language and logic used by the anti-racism industry. In the end, I do not know anyone to whom I could recommend this book. At the same time, I am glad that I read it and consider myself the better for it.

Why did I read this book? It comes highly recommended within the PC(USA) and makes it on various recommended reading lists. I read it because it was talked about for months within the Presbytery of Geneva and because I hear the Lord calling me to take race relations seriously. So, one of my disappointments with this book and its promotion by our denomination and presbytery is that the arguments contained with it are not explicitly tied to Christian values or Scripture. Thus, the book is not an aid to someone like me, who is trying to discern God’s call for reformation of the heart leading to kingdom action in his name.

The book describes the very personal journey that Debby Irving makes from her naïve, protected childhood to becoming “woke” on the matters of race relations. She starts off being careful about how her experiences are very personal and apply to her, but, later in the book, she progressively presumes a universality to her experience, perceptions, and values. I do not really fault her for this; we all fall into the trap of believing that others would see things our way if they had our experiences. [At the risk of falling down into a deep rabbit hole, I think that one of the terrible flaws of secular humanism is the belief that humanity could be unified by having a common socio-economic-educational experience. A biblical world view yields a different expectation.]

For me, the most annoying and distracting aspect of the book is that Debby Irving does not even now seem to realize that her life was extremely sheltered and also peculiar in other ways. Her experiences in becoming “woke” shocked her to the core and literally sickened her with guilt and remorse. I find that her extremely sheltered upbringing makes much of her journey inaccessible to me. For instance, as a child, Debbie had never heard that Native Americans were ever mistreated by settlers or by our government. I cannot recall a time in my life when I did not know this.

The second most annoying aspect of the book it that I think it is generally harsh in its many gratuitous, broad judgments. There are too many examples to capture here, but if you are not thick skinned and do not consider yourself “woke,” you are likely to find the book is filled with one “stick in the eye” after another. Please understand, the book is filled with touching anecdotes that most kind-hearted people would sorrow over or cheer over, right along with the author. But what many would not agree with is that “unwoke” people like to profit from racial bias and only “woke” people will do what is right. With a biblical world view, I do see good and evil pitched in conflict, but it is definitely not along the lines that I think Debby Irving is describing.

The third most annoying aspect of the book is that it has a lot a logical contradictions. For instance, Debbie Irving makes the argument (it was really more of an assertion) that businesses improve their bottom line when they incorporate “woke” multi-cultural ideology into their work environment. And then she argues that the workplace is tremendously resistant to the multi-cultural inclusion she and the anti-racism industry are promoting. Economic Darwinism does not really allow that contradiction to stand.

While there was plenty that annoyed ME, I did profit from this book. For instance, I now better understand why progressives say a culture of politeness is inherently racist. I also have a keener sense of how government policies, even within my lifetime, have adversely impacted the opportunity for people of color to create wealth and pass it from one generation to the next. I also have a keener sense of how people of color feel the burden of always being an ambassador for their race. One example Debby Irving offers is that she used to go out for the newspaper in her bathrobe. She learned that her neighbor, a person of color, always dressed up before going out because he felt that he (because of his race) would be judged if he went out too casually. In solidarity with her neighbor, Debbie now dresses up before getting the paper.

The one thing I take away from the book that really touched my heart and which I am still processing was an exchange the author had with a Black woman about their childhood dinner table conversations. It turns out that in Debby Irving’s family, race relations was never discussed at the dinner table. In her friend’s house, race relations was a topic of conversation every night. Even though my family sometimes talked about race relations at the dinner table, I feel that I can relate to this story. I believe that I am as sad as author was when she first discovered this difference, that neither she nor I had ever thought about. It is an example of “you don’t know what don’t know,” which I find humbling and a little frightful.

The book is well enough written so that one can learn a lot about the language and logic of the anti-racism industry. There are two results for me. One, I am better able to hear what anti-racists are saying, whether I agree with it or not. Two, I now hold with enhanced conviction that much of the societal model that Debby Irving assumes to be true is simply not real and, therefore, many of the solutions proposed by the anti-racism industry simply will fail to make society better.